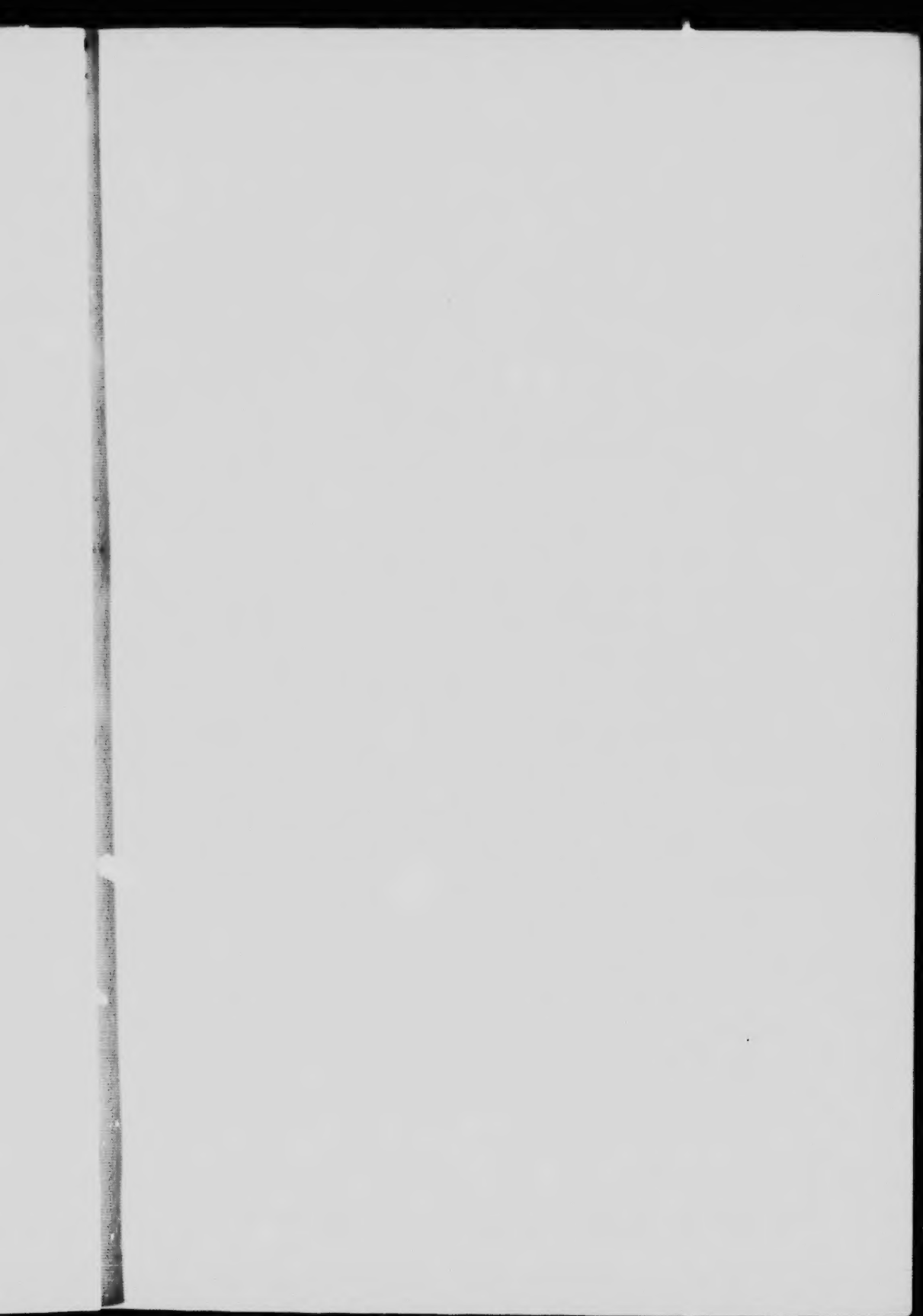
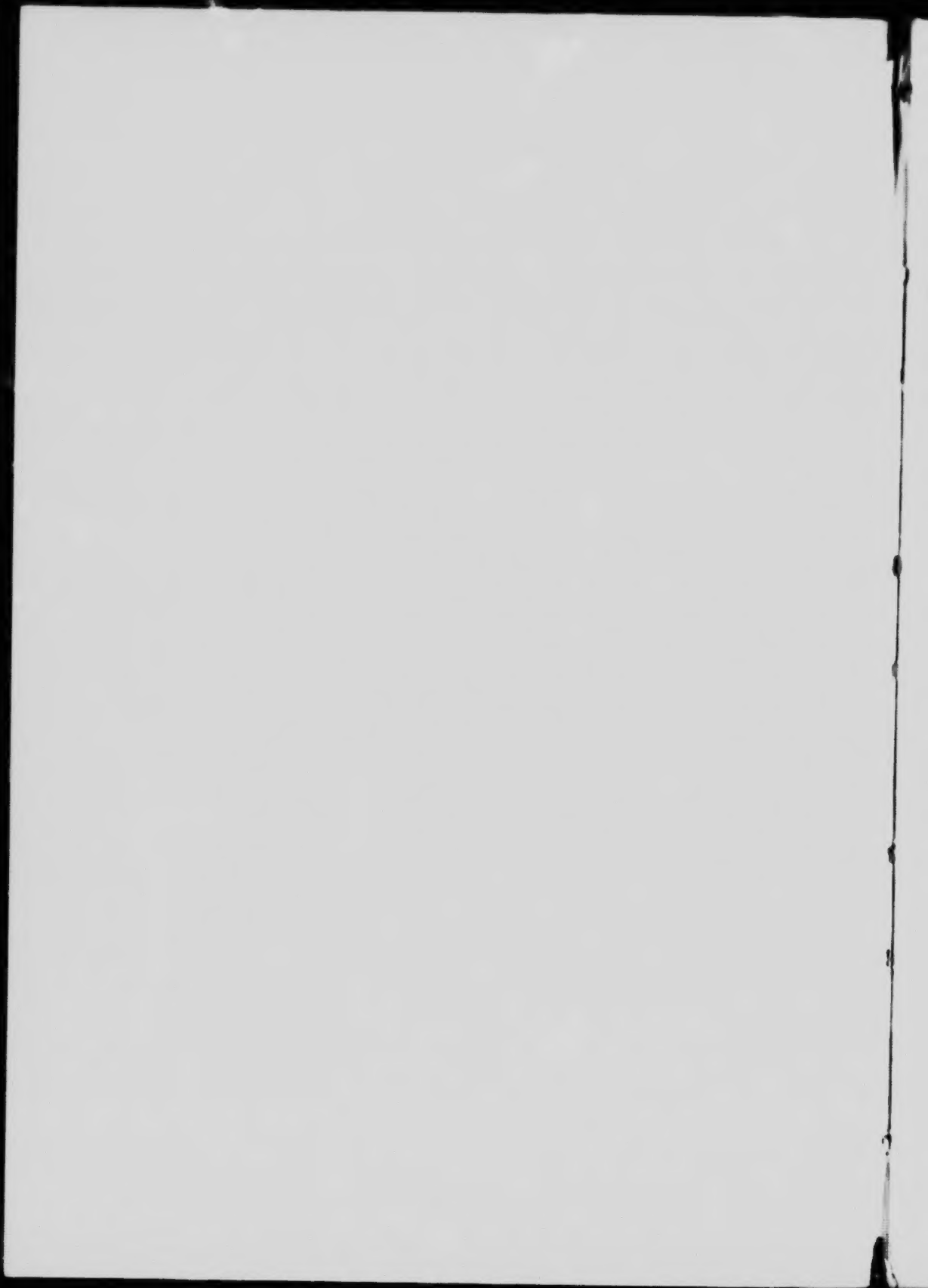






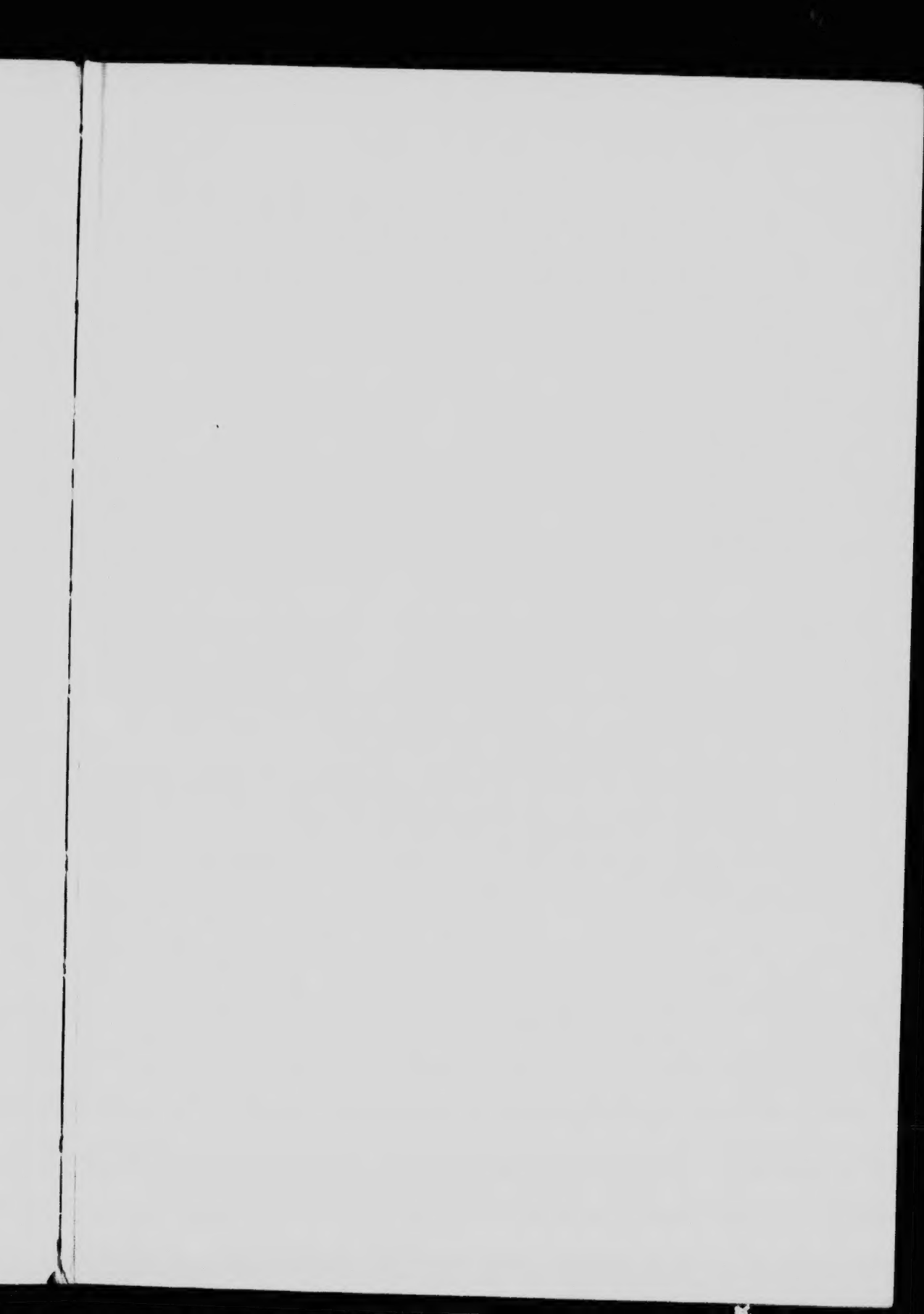




THE DESERTERS



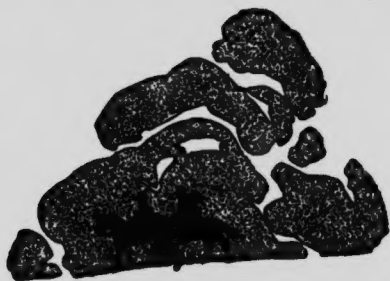






HE CRUSHED THE CIGAR IN HIS HAND AND RAISED HIS CLENCHED FIST
AS IF HE WOULD STRIKE HER—PAGE 187

The Deserters



George C. Jenks
&
Anna Alice Chapin

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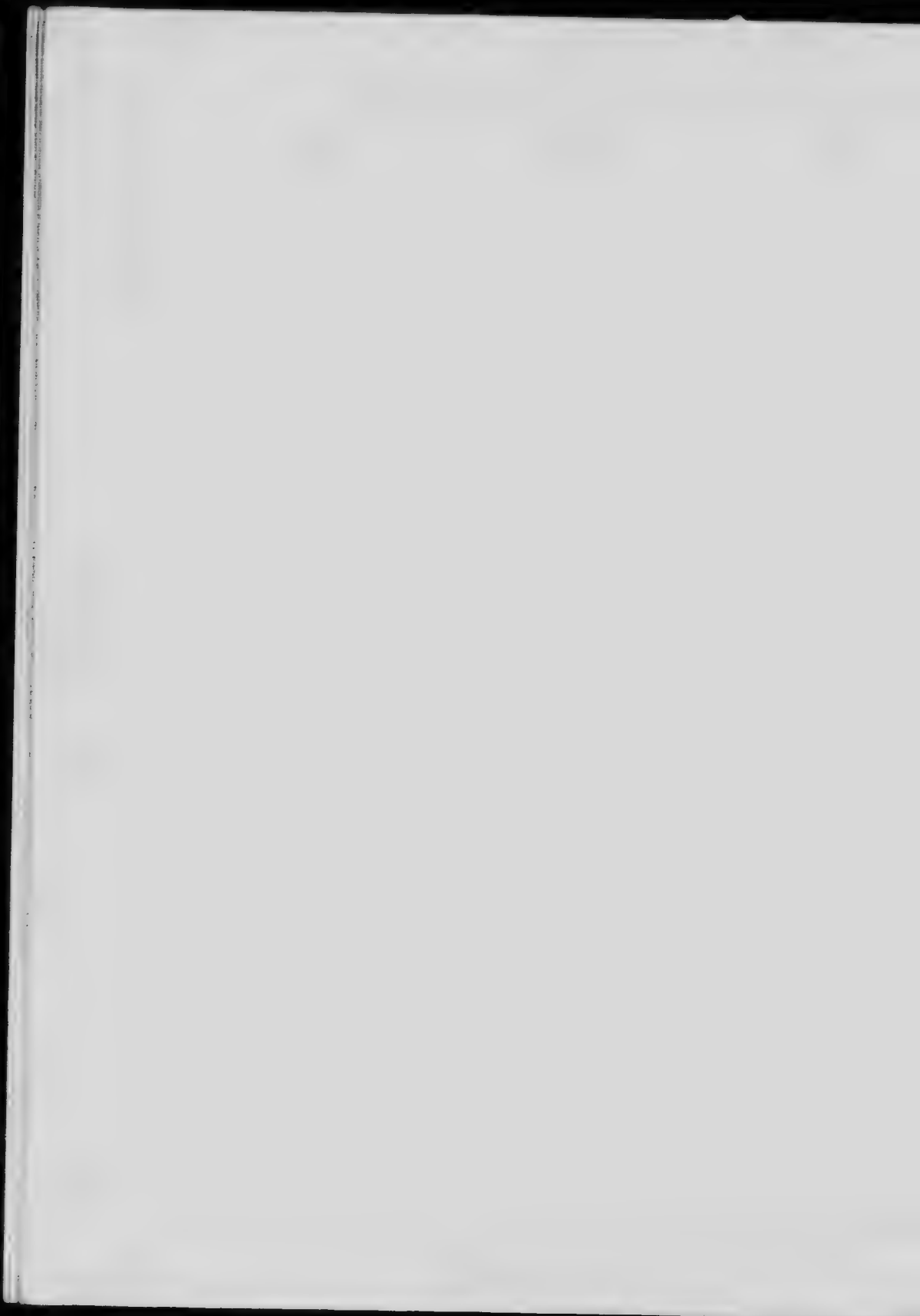
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THE DESERTERS

CHAPTER I

"TAPS"

THE flickering of a candle upon the wall, a wild noise of storm outside. Shadows, and a door blown open by the wind. A voice stilled quickly, in the darkness beyond the door. An empty, windy room—and the flickering of the candle upon the wall!

Out of the blackness came a man's face. The eyes, dimmed by alcohol, stared vacantly for an instant into the yellow-red embers of a dying fire. Then the face disappeared, and that of a woman took its place.

It was pretty, this woman's, but pitiably lacking in character. The eyes were too round and wide-open; the smooth, plump cheeks

could never have been furrowed by a strong emotion. Why, they did not show a wrinkle even now, when the half-open mouth, the nervous glances from side to side, and the hurried pushing back of the tumbled light hair, told dumbly of mortal terror. But they were deathly white.

Gradually the full length of her became visible in the faint glow from the fireplace, as she stood there, holding the top of her flowing wrapper close to her neck. Then she moved into the gloom and became a mere shadow near the man.

"Who is that?" she demanded in a low voice, imperious from fear.

The windows rattled noisily in the wind—for a Kansas hurricane raged outside—and the raindrops battered the glass like the distant clatter of musketry.

"You needn't be afraid, Mrs. Marston. I'm not a burglar. You don't find such gentry at an army post, you know."

The man laughed drunkenly at his own feeble pleasantry. She moved the candle to a table between them, and the light revealed him as a young, well-looking fellow, in the uni-

form of a second lieutenant. His cap was in his hand. A certain looseness of attire—the jacket slightly awry, a button unfastened, a sleeve pulled up from the wrist in unsoldierly creases—all told of the carelessness begot of strong drink. Undoubtedly intoxication was in the flushed cheeks, disordered hair and thick speech.

He blinked around the apartment. It was a typical garrison sitting-room, such as may be found repeated in officers' quarters over and over again all the way from Governor's Island to the Pacific coast. Domestic comfort and rough-and-ready militarism curiously mixed. Portraits of famous soldiers and battle scenes on the walls; a sword, with its belt, standing in a corner; books with warlike titles in an old-fashioned bookcase; well-worn upholstered walnut furniture, which had passed from one occupant to another for generations. Mingled with these relics of a by-gone time, newer articles bearing the impress of personal association—a white enameled desk, a gilt chair, embroidered cushions, photographs, and and so forth.

The clear notes of a bugle cut through the

din of the storm. It sounded "Taps." The young officer started and a look of embarrassment drove the smirk from his lips. In a steadier voice he said:

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Marston. I did not think it was so late. I hope you'll forgive me."

"But—why did you come, Lieutenant Craig? Didn't you know my husband was not here—that he was on duty?"

"I didn't think about him at all. Why should I? I came to see you. We've been jolly good friends, you and I, and I thought you would not object to a quiet little chat. If Marston happened to be away, so much the better. He's a good fellow, but, like most husbands, he is in the way sometimes."

He laughed stupidly again. Then he lurched toward a chair, and, with a rather wabby flourish, motioned her to sit down. She drew back, with an attempt at dignity.

"I think you are mistaken, Lieutenant Craig. I cannot recall that anything has passed between us which would warrant your visiting me at this hour, after 'Taps,' in the absence of my husband."

Jim Craig stared at her vacantly. It took time for ideas to penetrate his liquor-confused understanding. At last he answered, trying hard to control his voice:

"Nothing has passed between us, as you say, Mrs. Marston. But I like a bright woman. There is no harm in that, is there? Of course it is wrong for a fellow to squeeze her hand—if she objects. If she doesn't, why, he'd be a fool not to do it when he gets the chance. Flirtation is the spice of life, and—I like spice. Well, that's all. If you dismiss me, I'll go. I always obey orders."

He marched to the door that led to the courtyard. There he turned to face her. Clicking his heels together, he raised his right hand in salute. Half-drunk as he was, soldierly instinct prevailed. His salute was as full of "snap" as when he had learned to do it at West Point years before.

She waved him away impatiently. He swung around to the door. As he opened it a gust of wind from a raised window in the hall shouldered its way in, billowed her flimsy white draperies, and again burst open the door at the other end of the room.

A smothered cry from the woman made Jim Craig look back and exclaim thickly:

"Good Lord! Who'd have thought it?"

In the doorway, fumbling at the door in a vain effort to get it shut, stood a man. An officer, like himself, but of higher grade—a captain. His face was pale. Moreover, it betrayed a decidedly unwarrior-like apprehension. As he met the gaze of Craig, he stepped forward into the room, by the side of the shrinking Mrs. Marston, and, somewhat blusteringly, demanded:

"What are you doing here, Lieutenant Craig?"

A slow smile crept over the face of the younger man. He looked cynically from the captain to the woman and back again, before he returned:

"I am just going out. What are *you* doing here?"

The captain advanced threateningly.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Only Mrs. Marston has just reminded me that it is very late for a gentleman to call on her. Well, she's right; there can be no question about that. I had apolo-

gized for my intrusion, when I saw——" He broke off, to laugh with contemptuous amusement. "When I saw—you. In her room and in the dark! I'm sorry—for her sake—that the door blew open. I'm afraid it has annoyed her. And——"

The captain interrupted him with an oath and made as if he would attack him with his fists. The woman ran between them.

"Hush!"

"Don't be distressed, Mrs. Marston," said Craig easily. "I'm going. It's none of my business why Captain Harrison is here. Perhaps he came to see Marston. Of course, he did. He wouldn't be blackguard enough to be hiding in your room with any other object."

Again the captain tried to push past her. She beat her two hands upon his breast and pushed him back.

"No, no!" she whispered hoarsely. "You *must* not! Keep quiet! For mercy's sake, don't make a noise!"

The captain touched her hands with his own reassuringly, as he hissed at Craig:

"You're drunk, Lieutenant Craig. You

don't seem to realize that you are speaking to your superior officer."

"Oh, yes, I do. I know you are a captain, while I am only a second lieutenant. I'm not drunk, either. But I've had just enough to feel like letting you hear a few things that maybe no one has ever given you before. '*In vino veritas*,' you know. Now, I'm not such a fool as to think you were in that dark room waiting to see Lieutenant Marston——"

"Shut your mouth, you drunken idiot! It was nothing of the kind. I——"

The bantering smile left the face of Lieutenant Jim Craig. The lips hardened into a straight line. With the quick change in temper peculiar to certain stages of intoxication, he interrupted savagely:

"What are you talking about? Don't you think I can see?"

"Be quiet!" begged the woman. "Please——*please* don't make a noise here."

She stepped to the window and peeped out between the heavy curtains into the storm. "My husband——"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Marston," said Craig in a lower tone. "I won't make a noise."

But I want to say to this fellow, who sneaks in to make love to his friend's wife when he thinks there is no danger, that I have no use for him. He's my ranking officer. On the parade ground I have never forgotten it. He knows that. But I'm not speaking to him now as a lieutenant to his captain. We are man to man, and I can tell him what I think of his coming here to compromise the good name of a woman, just as I would if he had never worn shoulder-straps in his life."

"This comes very well from you," sneered Captain Harrison. "Why are *you* sneaking in here?"

"Because I am an ass," replied Craig. "If I hadn't been drinkin' I shouldn't have done it. I came to see Mrs. Marston. I confess that. I thought she liked me. She has been gracious and pleasant, and I presumed on it. Then, to-night, I drank more than I should, and came here on an irresponsible impulse."

"Humph!" scoffed Harrison.

"Seeing you has brought me to my senses. I thank the Lord I have the right to look Marston in the face as a clean man, and the right, as well, to look into yours and tell you

to your teeth what decent people think of hounds like you."

The woman could no longer keep them apart. Captain Harrison flung her hands violently away from him, as, frantic with anger, he fairly howled at Craig:

"I told you to shut up! Now——"

He hurled himself upon the lieutenant. So furious was he that he could not set himself to strike with anything like precision. On the other hand, Craig, a finished boxer, threw up his hands and arms scientifically. He parried easily the fierce, but futile, blow of his assailant. Simultaneously his left fist shot out, straight from the shoulder, and, with a dull smack, struck Harrison on the chin.

The captain crumpled up, senseless, at the feet of the woman.

There was tense silence for a moment. Then——

"Merciful Heaven! He's dead!" she gasped, and dropped on her knees by the side of the unconscious man.

Craig seemed to be almost sobered now.

"No. He'll come to himself in a few mo-

ments," he said, in a hollow whisper. "Get some water."

She ran into the next room, and, after what seemed to Craig a terribly long absence, returned with a glass of water. She wetted her lace handkerchief and dabbled it on the white face, while he slapped the hands and tried other methods of restoring consciousness common in the prize-ring and gymnasium after a "knockout."

But Harrison never moved. He lay flat upon his back—still, white, awful! Craig pushed up one of the eyelids. He found the eye dead. The hands were cold, and there was a horrible clamminess on the forehead. Craig looked at the woman. What he felt in his heart was reflected in her face.

"God! I've killed him!" he groaned.

"Yes, you've killed him," she returned stonily.

Craig looked at her for a moment, muttering to himself. Then he rushed from the room pell-mell into the tempest that was still tearing its way among the barrack buildings. He never stopped till he reached his own quarters.

Only one thing was in his disordered mind—to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the Thing that lay on the carpet in Mrs. Marston's sitting-room. He moved about with feverish haste. It did not take him long to change his appearance. In a derby hat, a raincoat over his sack suit, and with an umbrella in his hand, he soon became the counterpart of hundreds of ordinary American citizens abroad in the storm that night. Then he slipped out.

It took him some time to clear the post, for he must dodge at least one sentry. He was still manœuvring on the edge of the parade ground to pass the guard line, when he heard a shot, muffled by distance.

What did it mean? He did not know. But it made him take the chance of a run across the roadway, although the sentinel was not twenty yards away. The rain and high wind favored him. Soon he was walking briskly through the mud and water to the city.

In less than an hour he was in the "smoker" of a train going west.

"That shot!" he mused, as he took a cigar from his pocket and mechanically bit off the

end. "It must have been fired as an alarm when they found Harrison dead. *Dead?* God have mercy on me! Why, *I'm a murderer!* I! Jim Craig! *I've killed a man!*"

Now, for the first time, he seemed to be face to face with what he had done. He trembled from head to foot, as he raised his clenched hand and looked at it—white, sinewy, hard as a baseball. His face was drawn, his eyes red-rimmed and staring.

"Why didn't the fool let me alone? He began it. If he hadn't made a drive at me, I'd never have hit him. And I've *killed* him! It was all that woman! She played me off against him. I can see it now. He was jealous. That's the explanation. Well, she's not the first woman to make men kill each other." Then, after a pause, he uttered a fierce, foul curse, and in conjunction with it came the word, hissed in bitter scorn, "*Women!*"

He lighted his cigar and began to puff at it furiously. For the time, at least, Jim Craig hated all women.

The conductor came through the car. Craig had bought a ticket for Denver. He meant to stay there for a few hours. Then he would

take an express straight through to San Francisco. He was a deserter now, and the sooner he put himself far away from his regiment the better.

"Bad night!" remarked the conductor, as he punched Craig's ticket. "But I don't suppose you soldiers mind that."

"Soldier? What made you think——"

"I beg your pardon. I used to be in the army myself, and I put you down for an officer as soon as I saw you come through the train. I can generally tell the swing of a cavalryman."

"Well, you're wrong this time. I learned to ride on a cattle ranch. A man isn't obliged to go into the army to be a horseman."

"No, that's so," conceded the conductor. But he added to himself, as he walked down the aisle: "All the same, you're no cow-puncher. You wouldn't have those soft white hands if you'd been used to roping and tying cattle on the plains."

As the train rushed on toward the Rockies, Jim Craig wondered just how pronounced a cavalry stride he really had.

CHAPTER II

"EYES FRONT!"

IT was a bright morning in May. Nearly four weeks had passed since Lieutenant Jim Craig stole from the fort in the rain and darkness to take the train for the far West. Colonel Parsons stood at the window of his study, overlooking the parade ground, where the spring sun, playing hide-and-seek with the clouds, sent light shadows dancing over the greensward, and now and then flashed insolently in the face of the colonel himself.

But he did not mind the sun. He was watching his troops go through their regular morning drill, and he was not pleased with their work.

By his side stood Surgeon-Major Long. The latter was as touchy on all matters concerning the honor of the regiment as the colonel himself. So when the commanding officer expelled his breath in a disgusted "Humph!"

Doctor Long echoed it with a despairing "Woof!"

"Pretty ragged, eh, doctor?" said the colonel.

"Yes. That line is so crooked you can't see the end of it from here. What's the trouble? Those new horses?"

"Partly. Greer mounts will spoil any formation unless they are held well in hand."

The drill went on.

An incoherent order was snapped out gruffly by an officer who had galloped his horse near to the window. A bugle call followed, and sixty cavalymen swept past in two long lines—swords glittering, accoutrements jingling, and the gay-colored guidon streaming and flapping in the wind.

Again an order, repeated by the bugler, and the men reined up to the left, leaving room for another troop.

"That's not bad," observed the doctor.

"No, that's Ward's lot, 'K.' He handles them very well. But look at 'D.' What the deuce is the matter with them? They used to be the smartest troop in the regiment."

"H'm! They're all out of hand," grunted

Doctor Long. "That was Craig's troop, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Collins has it now. I'll have to send for him and rake him over the coals."

"Poor Craig! What a mess he did make of it! You've never heard anything about him since he went away that night, have you?"

"Not a word. We ran to his quarters as soon as we found Harrison was dead. But he had gone. He had taken time to put on civilian clothes and to gather up what money he had. His uniform was lying on the bed, just as he had thrown it off. He must have gone direct to the railroad station in town. The ticket agent knew him by sight. He told me Craig had bought a ticket to Denver."

"I never heard that before. Did you trace him to Denver?"

Colonel Parsons walked up and down the room twice. When he stopped abruptly in front of his companion, a curious expression was in his face. He looked the doctor straight in the eye, as he answered, in a deliberate tone:

"No. I did *not* trace him."

There was a pause. Doctor Long nodded.

"I understand, colonel," he murmured.

"I'm sure you do, doctor. I told the ticket agent not to repeat what he had told me to anybody else. I think Craig is only a deserter. We sent out a report from the fort that Harrison had shot himself accidentally. I have influence enough with the civil authorities to get them to take my view. It was my duty to report to Washington, of course. But the War Department can keep its own secrets. It will never leak out there, you may be sure."

"I suppose there is no question that Craig *did* kill Harrison?"

"Well, we have the evidence of the Marstons. They heard a shot in their sitting-room, and when they ran in, found Harrison dead on the floor. He had been shot in the back. Craig's pistol lay by the side of the body."

"But what motive could there have been? Craig and Harrison were pretty good friends. At least they always seemed so. Another thing. What the blazes were they doing in Marston's quarters at that time of night?"

Colonel Parsons shrugged his shoulders.

"I've puzzled over that for four weeks. Anyone can see there is a delicate side to the matter."

"Hum!" grunted the doctor.

"Washington is sending me a woman detective. She will try to bring Craig back—as a deserter. She's a daughter of Captain Summers, who died in Cuba."

"What? Summers of the Sixth?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! Good man, Summers! I didn't know he had a daughter. Detective, eh? Queer profession for a girl, isn't it?"

"It doesn't seem so for her. You see, her father having been an officer, she was brought up in a military atmosphere, and her love and reverence for the army amount to a passion. I'm told she is one of the best detectives in the service. She's caught many a deserter."

"But Craig is worse than a deserter."

"Not to her," rejoined the colonel quickly. "She doesn't know he is charged with murder."

"Why, how——"

"She absolutely refuses to touch any case where there is a possibility of capital punishment. Headquarters has warned me of that."

"That so? How will you get around it?"

"I've given orders that no one is to tell her

about Harrison's death. She's been told that Craig struck a superior officer and ran away. That's all. She'll never find out about the murder around the post. Even a woman is welcome to anything she can get out of my men when they've been ordered to hold their tongues."

"Kind of tough on her, it seems to me," growled the doctor.

"It's for the good of the service," replied the colonel, somewhat sternly. "Everything must give way to that. And, anyhow——"

The doctor, who was standing at the window, idly looking out, interrupted him with a sudden shout.

"By George! I thought she'd be trampled to death," he cried. "She was right square in the way! If the men hadn't been halted, they must have ridden over her."

"Who is it?"

Colonel Parsons was at the window by this time. He saw, standing in the middle of the great parade ground, a girl of about twenty, calmly smiling at the excited officer who had dashed up to warn her of her danger. A few yards away, sixty mounted men had reined up,

in response to the command to "Halt!" and every man of them was gazing at her approvingly. In her neat tailor-made suit of black and white, and under a new spring hat, she was a good excuse for their admiration.

The trouble was all over in a few seconds. With a smile for the officer in command and a sidelong, friendly glance at the line of cavalrymen, the girl walked swiftly toward the colonel's quarters. The doctor grinned through the window.

"She's a self-possessed young lady, if ever I saw one," he said. "Suppose she should be——"

"I guess that's who it is," broke in the colonel. "She was to arrive this morning."

"Well, she's used to military tactics, or she'd never have kept her head with that troop galloping straight toward her. The average girl would have screamed and tried to get out of the way."

Colonel Parsons laughed.

"She knew better than that," he chuckled. "She just let them charge until they were stopped. That was the officer's business, and she knew it."

The girl had come into the building by this time. A tap at the door, and the entrance of an orderly interrupted the conversation. The man saluted and handed a card to the colonel.

"Miss Madge Summers," read Colonel Parsons, aloud. "Show the lady in, orderly."

CHAPTER III

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

SHE stood in the doorway, smiling. Just a slip of a girl, but with something in the firm chin, as well as the honest, straight-gazing gray eyes, that told of the ability to carry a set purpose to fruition.

Perfectly self-possessed she was, as she looked from the colonel to the doctor and back again.

"I come from Headquarters at Washington."

Her voice was rather deeper than might have been expected, but wholly feminine. There was a cadence in it that pleased the colonel, and his heavy gray mustache went up in a smile of welcome.

"I am pleased to see you, Miss Summers. Let me present our surgeon, Major Long. I knew your father, Captain Summers, of the Sixth, very well. I did not expect to see you

when Headquarters told me they had sent a detective, however."

"Don't I look like one?" she asked, with a smile.

"Well, possibly. You are the first I ever met. But I assure you that I feel inclined to desert to-morrow if you'll bring me back."

"Ah, colonel, I'd never bring *you* back."

She said this almost absently, as her quick eyes flashed about the room. Then she looked through the window to the parade ground, where the troopers, having been dismissed, were galloping their horses toward the stables.

"Miss Summers," blurted out the colonel, as he placed a chair for her near his desk, "your mother was of Irish birth, was she not?"

"Well, colonel, she was born in America. But her father—my grandfather—came from County Cork."

"I knew it!" he shouted. "I could have sworn to it. And he kissed the blarney stone so often that its virtues descended to his granddaughter."

"Yes, colonel, I guess he did kiss it once in a while. And, what's more, when he crossed the

sea, he brought a bit of the stone with him. I have it now, and I kiss it every morning before breakfast, d'ye moind."

She said this with a demure smile and a little touch of brogue that sent both Colonel Parsons and Doctor Long into a roar of laughter. So violent was it that, in the colonel's case, it threatened to become apoplectic.

"Ah, that accounts for it all," he spluttered. "I suppose you always carry it with you, eh?"

"Certainly; I have it right where it belongs—in my vanity-box." Then, in a business-like tone, she went on: "Will you kindly tell me what this case is? I learned practically nothing in Washington. I only know I am to bring back a deserter."

"Yes, that's it. He's a deserter."

"Poor fellow! I always feel so sorry for a man who leaves his regiment in that way. Somehow, a deserter reminds me of a runaway horse, who does not know why he does it, and keeps on only because he is nervous and bewildered and is afraid to stop."

"You love horses, Miss Summers?" said the doctor.

"Yes, as much as I love soldiers. In the ab-

stract, of course," she added quickly, with a smile. "That's why I threw up a case I had just before I came here."

"Threw it up? Wasn't that unusual? I didn't know you ever did that."

"Well, doctor, I love my profession. But there are some things I won't do. I found that the man I was told to bring back—he belonged to the Seventeenth—was wanted for murder. I will not touch a case of that kind. It would make me feel like an executioner."

"And yet, when a man has killed another, surely he should be made to answer for it," protested the colonel. "It doesn't always mean punishment for him, you know. Sometimes it turns out that the act was justifiable—in a degree, at least. In any case, as a man, he should not be afraid to face the music."

"Perhaps so. But I won't have anything to do with such cases. I just *can't*; that's all."

"The sentiment does you credit, Miss Summers," broke in the doctor, with his customary vehemence. "I don't see how anybody could ask you to do such a thing. Eh, colonel?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, of course," was the colonel's

halting response. "But about this case, Miss Summers?"

"Yes. What made your man desert?"

Colonel Parsons glanced rather helplessly at Doctor Long. That energetic gentleman came to the rescue immediately:

"In a nutshell, Miss Summers, one of our boys got to drinking too much, struck a superior officer, and skipped out. Those are about the facts, I believe."

Colonel Parsons nodded.

"That sounds very simple," she said. "Have you a photograph of the man?"

"I will send for one," was the colonel's answer. "We have traced him—or think we have—to the Pacific coast. We have had the ports watched, and, so far as we can find out, he has not left the country."

"Then it's merely a matter of sifting the waterfront, I should say."

Sifting the waterfront! She spoke as if this were as trifling a task as picking out a blue bead in a white necklace. Sifting the waterfront! To watch every seaport city from Seattle to San Diego, and lay her hand on a

man she had never seen, and who would doubtless have adopted another name and be making every effort to conceal his identity! Yet this young girl, little more than a child, calmly contemplated doing this offhand and with no misgiving of failure.

Colonel Parsons looked at her in involuntary admiration.

"I like to see soldiers keen about their work," he said. "And you *are* a soldier—starting on a hard campaign, too."

"Oh, I don't know, colonel," she laughed. "It's all in the day's work. As there is a clue pointing to the West, I'd better leave here to-day. I'll go to San Francisco first. I ought to pick up the trail of my man there. It's the most likely place, anyhow. By the way, is he a noncom. or a private?"

"Why, Miss Summers, as a matter of fact, he was neither. He was a second lieutenant."

"A commissioned officer?" she cried, surprised. "And a *deserter*? An officer of the army, to go back on his colors? Why should you *want* to find a man of that sort? I should say you *were* well rid of him. An enlisted man—a ranker—is different. He is answerable

only to his officers. But an officer is directly responsible to the government—to his country. When he goes away, as you tell me this lieutenant has gone, it is an outrage on the whole army—treason to the flag!"

In her indignation she rose from her chair, and—perhaps unconsciously—fixed her eyes on the Stars and Stripes floating from the lofty pole in the middle of the parade ground.

There was silence for a few moments. Then Colonel Parsons said gravely:

"Miss Summers, this is an exceptional case. Lieutenant Craig has gone away somewhere in the deepest shame and regret. That we know. He is a good officer and a splendid fellow. Because of his popularity he was led into temptation when drink was about. He was under the influence of intoxicants on the night of his disappearance. It led to his striking a superior officer."

"What a pity!" murmured the girl. "Still, even that hardly explains why he should run away. Who was the officer? May I see him?"

The colonel and Doctor Long drew quick breaths.

"Why—er—he is away just now."

"Is he? Well, after all, it isn't important for me to see him. If—I should take the case——"

"But you will take it, won't you, Miss Summers?" interrupted the colonel. "They are very anxious at Headquarters that you should."

"But what *good* would it do to bring the man back? You can't make him stay. All you *can* do is to force him to throw up his commission and put disgrace upon him. No; I don't want to take this case. If I had known, I would not have come here at all. Whenever I go after a deserter, I must feel that I am helping him."

"In what way?"

"By bringing him back to a new, square life," she replied promptly. "Not merely dragging him to the guardhouse for punishment."

Colonel Parsons strode up and down the room in silence for a few moments. The girl's attitude perplexed him. All the more because, secretly, he agreed with her. He would have preferred to let Jim Craig escape, if it had been consistent with his duty. He did not believe that the young man was altogether to blame. Like everybody else at the post, he had heard a great deal about the suspicious relations between Harrison and Mrs. Marston.

Suddenly Craig became a factor in the scandal. Then the question of the hour was whether he would cut Harrison out. It had never been answered. The tragedy could be read whichever way one chose. Now, if the young man were brought back, the whole miserable business must be threshed out, with the moral certainty that the good name of the post would suffer.

The colonel knew that men don't kill each other for nothing, as a rule, and he honestly believed that, judged strictly by the code of honor, Craig had done only what he must when he slew Captain Harrison.

He could not explain all this to the dainty, but determined, young lady at the window, however. If he held her services at all, it must be only to capture a deserter—not to take a murderer. Fortunately, she did not suspect that Craig had done anything worse than strike a superior officer. She never must know—until she had got her man. Then it wouldn't matter. A cold-blooded argument, the colonel admitted to himself. But, unhappily, the whole business was cold-blooded.

"Miss Summers," he said briskly, to hide his

uncertainty as to her intentions, "you must have a photo of Lieutenant Craig. I'll see about getting one at once."

The girl was looking out of the window at a khaki-clad soldier who chanced to be passing, and she did not answer. The colonel smiled. He felt he was gaining his point.

"Orderly!" he called.

The man came in and saluted.

"My compliments to Lieutenant Marston, and will he kindly send me the photograph of Lieutenant James Craig in his possession?"

As the orderly disappeared, the colonel walked over to the side of the girl, who was still following the soldier with her eyes as he walked across the grass.

"Fine fellows you have, Colonel Parsons," she said musingly, without looking away from the window. "Even your enlisted men have as much style as some officers I've seen elsewhere. I can't help wondering how this Lieutenant Craig could find it in his heart to leave them."

"When a man has committed a crime, especially in the madness of liquor, he may do

anything. He has lost his sense of proportion, I should say," returned the colonel gravely.

She swung around like a flash.

"You said '*crime*,' colonel."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Striking a superior officer is a crime—a very serious one under the 'Articles of War.'"

"Yes, that's true. I know that," and she nodded sadly.

The colonel strolled away from her and busied himself with some papers on his desk. Doctor Long was by his side. He had been listening to the conversation.

"What do you suppose made her take me up on that word '*crime*,' doc?" whispered the colonel.

"I've no idea. But she can't know anything about the Harrison business. I'm sure of that," was the comforting response.

"I hope not."

The orderly came in.

"Lieutenant Marston is bringing the photograph, sir."

Even as he spoke, Marston entered. He was a dark man, with very black eyes and a face

lined with stormy passions. He handed the colonel a photograph.

"Hello, Marston! You needn't have given yourself this trouble," said Colonel Parsons, in his hearty way. "Why didn't you send it? I felt certain you'd be willing to let me have this picture. Mrs. Marston took it with her kodak, didn't she? It is the only one of Craig that I know of, and—— Oh, pardon me! Lieutenant Marston, this is Miss Madge Summers, of the Secret Service. She has come from Washington to trace Lieutenant Craig for us. I wanted the picture for her use."

As Marston and the girl acknowledged the introduction, each gave the other a quick, penetrating look. There was indefinable apprehension in that of the man. She caught it and wondered.

"What's he afraid of?" she thought. "And how is it his wife has the only picture of Craig in the post? H'm! I wish I knew all the details of this case. Because then——"

The harsh voice of Marston interrupted her reflections.

"I should like to have that picture back when you have finished with it, colonel," he said.

"I can promise that it will be returned safely," he answered, as he placed the photo in Miss Summers' hand.

She looked at the pictured face with intense interest, and seemed to have forgotten everything else, until she suddenly broke out, without looking up:

"Colonel, would it be possible for me to talk with the last persons—besides Captain Harrison—who saw Mr. Craig?"

"Mrs. Marston was the last person to talk to him in barracks," said the colonel.

"No," put in Marston, with a black frown. "Thwayte, on orderly duty, saw him pass later."

"Oh!" exclaimed the colonel, plainly puzzled. "I did not remember that."

"Thwayte, then," said Miss Summers. "May I see him?"

The colonel looked vexed and worried.

"Why, that's unfortunate," he returned. "Most unfortunate. Thwayte was invalided home some days ago."

The girl sighed impatiently. What a useless, unhelpful lot they all were. But she shook

aside her momentary disgust, and, with her usual smile, asked:

"Can you tell me anything about Lieutenant Craig's personal appearance, tastes, habits?"

"Yes," replied the colonel. "As you see, he is good looking, and wears, or did wear, a short mustache. He is tall and his eyes are gray. He's fond of horses, as a cavalryman should be, plays the piano a bit, and makes a bluff at singing when in congenial company."

"I see. In other words, he is a rattling good soldier. Popular with the ladies, too, I have no doubt."

"Colonel," interrupted Marston, his face white and his black eyes like two dark pits. "Have you any further orders for me?"

"No, Marston. This is all. I'll see you get the picture back. Tell Mrs. Marston, will you?"

Marston saluted the colonel. Then, as he bowed to Miss Summers, she saw again that hunted expression and wondered. He stalked out, and, as he went, Doctor Long joined him.

"Colonel," said Miss Summers, turning to him, the portrait in her hand, "I've decided to

take this case. From all I can hear of Lieutenant Craig, he is too good a man to be allowed to go to ruin. It is clear to me that his one hope of finding himself lies in his getting back to his regiment, taking his punishment, whatever it may be, and resolving not to be a fool again. I'll start for San Francisco this afternoon."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE MARCH

THE earnestness with which Miss Madge Summers suddenly declared her determination took the colonel rather by surprise. He should have been pleased. He did not quite know whether he was or not. But there was no hesitation in his manner as he said quietly:

"I thank you, Miss Summers. It is for the good of the service. Your loyalty will be appreciated at Headquarters. Mr. Craig was a second lieutenant, it is true, and I know you have never taken a case like it before. But I felt sure that, on consideration, you would see how little the deserter's rank has to do with the action to be taken."

"Still, I do not understand. Wouldn't it have been much easier for Lieutenant Craig to resign his commission, instead of running away in the night? As you say, the fact that

he was under the influence of drink must account for what he did, I suppose."

"It accounts for his whole trouble," replied the colonel. "In his proper senses, he was the last man to have been guilty of treating a ranking officer with disrespect, much less of striking him."

"I wish, colonel, you would tell me just what took place that night."

Colonel Parsons looked away from her in frowning thought.

"Is that essential, Miss Summers? You know that he left the regiment illegally, after a gross breach of discipline, and that you are charged with bringing him back. Is not that sufficient for your purpose?"

She laughed. The colonel, who had an ear for music, felt a thrill as if a particularly sweet organ tone were ringing through the room. Miss Summers' voice was one of her natural assets which lost nothing of their value when she was amused.

"Don't you allow anything for feminine curiosity, colonel?"

"Not in your case, my dear young lady. I don't believe you would permit that weakness

(or virtue, if you like) to interfere with your profession."

"My profession?" she repeated, her face clouding over. "Yes, I must not forget that. And yet sometimes it is such a relief to get away from it, to drop the scent of the trail, to feel for a few moments that I am just a girl, like others, instead of Miss Summers of the Secret Service—the man-hunter."

"I thought you loved your calling."

"I do love it, when I am fairly at work. My father was a soldier, and something of the old campaigner must be in me. It showed early. Even at school I longed for adventure. I'm afraid I sought it occasionally. Not that there was much adventure to be found there. Slipping out of bounds to get down to the candy store and holding moonlight supper parties in the dormitory was about the extent of it. Occasionally we were caught. That meant punishment—in the shape of extra lessons and confinement to the academy yard. But who cared for that? We used to imagine ourselves in a moated grange, with a great drawbridge, and portcullis, and battlements, and donjon

keeps, and towers, and all the rest of it. Oh, it was great fun!"

Again that organ-toned laugh, with the *vox humana* stop on. The colonel joined in with his deep "Ha, ha!" and the orderly outside the door wondered what the "old man" and the girl were having such a good time about. He was almost desperate enough to open the door and see.

"But you have much more serious adventures now?"

"Indeed I have. In every case the life and career of some man is at stake. Of course, I don't mean that the men I am after are ever in actual danger of losing their lives. Desertion in time of peace is not a capital offence. If it were, I should not be an army detective. Do you know, colonel, I have never caught a deserter who really objected to going back to his regiment? It is this innate loyalty on the part of the true soldier that reconciles me to the deceptions I am obliged to practice almost continually."

"Yes," said the colonel, "I suppose you're required to be something of an actress."

"Actress?" she echoed, with a laugh. "That is the essence of my work. When I am in the harness it is rarely in my own person. I think my liking for mimicry is partly responsible for my becoming a detective. I love to wear a disguise. You see, to find my man, it is so often necessary for me to become an essential part of the life into which I am thrown. I may be an old apple woman, sitting behind my basket on a street corner, a waiter in a restaurant, or a dancer in a music hall. Sometimes I am some poor little shabby person whom nobody notices—a mere city waif. But always I must keep eyes and ears open. I am playing a game in which I have no partner, and any false move counts against me—and me only."

Looking at this girl, in her well-made frock, and her spring hat set on her head with just that touch of "style" that comes natural to some women, it was hard to imagine her as anything but a very attractive young lady. Her assertion that she was sometimes an old apple woman, for instance, seemed preposterous. That is, until one noted the flashing of the eyes, the coming and going of the rose color in the cheeks, and the firm line of the pretty mouth.

Taking all these into account, one never doubted that Miss Summers could be at will anything or anybody she pleased.

Madge declined the colonel's invitation to luncheon with his family. She had to return to the hotel, she said, to arrange about her baggage and to get her ticket to San Francisco. It would employ all her time until she took her train. She met Mrs. Parsons, however, and that stately lady was much taken with the bright young girl who followed such an unusual profession.

It also chanced that several of the colonel's staff dropped in to see him on "business." Naturally, they were presented to Miss Summers. The only officer of prominence who did not come in was Lieutenant Marston. The others all wished her a pleasant trip to the coast. They understood she was going there, they said. But no one intimated that he knew what her mission was. She did not say anything about it, either.

Her heart was rather sad as she walked across the closely-cut lawn of the parade ground, where the trampling hoofs of the horses had left their marks, together with the

sweet scent that bruised grass gives forth on a mild spring day.

She was always depressed when she started on a new case. This regardless of her surroundings. The sunshine and verdure, the flying flags and the uniform she had loved from her cradle, were inspiring. But in her bosom was an ache that would not be stilled, while conscience seemed to say reproachfully:

"Poor lads! To be trapped like frightened wild beasts! And by a woman! Poor lads!"

Resolutely she beat back this silent protest. She must not heed anything that might interfere with the thoroughness of her work. Work! Yes, that was all! Just a task for which she would be paid wages. What had sentiment to do with it? And yet—— Poor lads! Poor lads!

But there was nothing sad or thoughtful in the appearance of the young woman who walked through the hotel lobby in town an hour afterward. She had changed her dainty black-and-white suit and spring hat for a darker costume, and wore a close-fitting felt hat. It would be more comfortable to travel in than

the feathered "confection" with which she had paralyzed the post.

Miss Summers partook of luncheon alone in the hotel dining-room. It was a well-ordered meal, made up of wholesome, satisfying dishes, which would give the maximum of nourishment in the smallest compass—the sort of order a person accustomed to the *cuisine* of hotels always gives. Madge was not to be led astray by enticingly-named indigestibles on a decorated menu.

Her self-possession and the fact that she had plenty of money held off curiosity at the hotel as to her business. All they knew was that her name was Miss M. Summers, and that her home was in Washington, L. C. This much the register told them. She had written her name and city in a firm, legible hand, when she arrived in the morning. In response to the almost agonized look of curiosity in the face of the clerk, she had volunteered the additional information that her father had been Captain Summers, of the Sixth Cavalry, and that she was going to see Colonel and Mrs. Parsons at the army post, just outside of the city limits.

The clerk had to be content with that. She told him no more when she returned from the post.

She left the hotel in time to catch the train for the West. But she did not get to the station half an hour too soon, as many young ladies traveling there would have done. She had had long experience of railroads. Well she knew that while a train might be five minutes—ten minutes—an hour—or six hours—late, it never would start before its scheduled moment. It was part of her business-like method to economize time whenever it could be done.

As she settled herself comfortably in a Pullman car for her three days' journey over the mountains and across the plains, she took the photograph of Lieutenant Jim Craig from her handbag and studied it closely.

"It's no use," she murmured. "I cannot believe this man would leave his regiment without some powerful cause. Striking a superior officer is bad. But," shaking her head positively, "alone, that is not enough to explain his running away."

She glanced out of the window at the flying

landscape, reddened by the dying sun. The interminable lines of fences, the great squares of green where the wheat and rye were just showing in the furrows, the tired men and horses on their way home, and at the back of it all the great golden-red ball of fire sinking behind the western hills. All this came to her weeks later, when she had time to recall this part of her journey. Just now her mental vision was turned inward, and what she seemed to be gazing at was as a picture thrown upon a plate in a camera, invisible until it should be developed in days to come.

Most of the time on the train she was studying the photograph. For mile after mile she looked at the pictured features of this eager-faced young man. She admired the straight nose, broad forehead, strong chin, and eyes that met her own almost as if they were alive. A handsome face! That beyond dispute. A good face, too, or Madge Summers was no judge of physiognomy.

"He might have struck his officer. He is just the sort that would, if he got real mad," she decided. "But not without good reason. No, not even if he had been drinking. I wish

Colonel Parsons had told me all about the quarrel. It would have been some satisfaction. Not that it would have helped me in finding him. The colonel was right there. After all, what is it to me what they quarreled about? And yet——"

And yet—she continued to stare at the face in the photograph at intervals, all the way to the Golden Gate.

From the ferry in San Francisco she drove to a certain quiet hotel, where she was well known. Here she took possession of two comfortable rooms on an upper floor. They were always hers when she went there, unless they happened to be occupied. In that case there would be another suite, almost the counterpart of the first, at her disposal.

Madge heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction as she threw open a window in the little sitting-room. The waters of San Francisco bay lay stretched before her. There is not a more glorious prospect in the world. But almost beneath her feet were the sordid wretchedness and glaring vice of that most notorious of waterside districts, the "Barbary Coast." It is there that crime is the fashion, the law a

joke, and decency an incentive to ribald laughter.

Madge knew that well enough. Then why did the clear gaze of this pretty girl turn from the beautiful perspective of the harbor to the noisome cluster of miserable houses comprised in "Old Barbary?"

Well, there must have been some reason. Madge Summers was going about her work now, and she always had a sound motive for everything she did.

CHAPTER V.

RECONNOITERING

AFTER three nights on a sleeping car, one appreciates a bed that stands still. Miss Summers was a healthy young woman and could sleep in a Pullman more soundly than most persons. Once asleep, she stayed there. She did not wake up at every little excuse, or no excuse at all. Never was she guilty of a hysterical scream and a wild clutch at the air when the train swung around a sharp curve. The negro porter, slouching along the aisle, could lunge into her curtains a dozen times in the night without disturbing her. She was hardened to these things. Nevertheless, she was glad to go comfortably to bed in the quiet hotel when this evening came.

She had earned her rest, too. Not only by the long trip across the country, but by walking and riding about the city nearly all day. It was early morning when the train got in,

and she set to work at once. From breakfast time to sundown she sought clues to the deserter—Jim Craig. That was how she spent her first twelve hours in San Francisco. Strange occupation for a girl? Well, it depends on the girl.

Ever since the death of her father, Madge had lived alone. Her mother had died years before, and Madge was the only child. With both parents gone, she had no very near relatives left. Aunts, uncles and cousins there were, it is true. Several of them offered her a home, but she preferred to be independent. Fortunately, she had inherited enough money to live respectably, if frugally. So, in Washington, where she had scores of influential friends—army people, mostly, who had known and esteemed her father—she kept a small apartment, which she occupied when not away on a case, and which she always called her real home. But she was essentially a cosmopolite. Seldom was she in Washington for more than a few weeks at a time.

On her second morning in San Francisco she put on clothing that seemed brutally out of keeping with her own fresh and modest girl-

hood. Instead of the neat black-and-white tailor-made suit, she arrayed herself in a cheap, flimsy pink gown, with tawdry, tinsel trimming "done" it indeed to perfection. Then she built up her hair with "rats" and false curls, setting it all off with a splutter of imitation jewels—maddening reds, greens and blues, and several "diamonds."

Madge smiled at herself in the mirror when she had finished "doing" her hair. She had "done" it indeed to perfection. Then she brought forth from her trunk a regulation theatrical "make-up" box, and attacked her cheeks with a rouge rag and powder puff. Soon she had a violent bloom that would look well at night, under artificial lights, but was sad enough in the sunshine. She finished the assault on her face by touching the lips with carmine, painting the eyebrows and blacking the lashes.

"It looks more like a mask than a real face," she remarked to her reflection in the glass. "But it will be strictly in fashion at Reilly's, even in the daylight."

A large straw hat, turned up rakishly at one side and garnished with red roses and green

feathers, came next from the trunk, and Madge tried the effect on her head.

"Tough enough even for the Barbary Coast," she murmured. "If Lieutenant Craig suspects me when he sees this, then he must be blessed with marvelous penetration. I only hope he will be there. The sooner I have finished this job the better I shall be pleased. This is the first time I ever felt that my work was treacherous. Always before it has seemed that I was doing the right thing. But now——"

The photograph of Jim Craig lay on the dresser before her. She studied it in silence for several moments.

"I don't know why it is, but as I look at his picture I can't shake off the idea that he is asking me how I can bring myself to run him down, when he is trying so hard to get away. It's a stupid feeling. If he's the kind of man all his friends at the post say—a rattling good soldier and thoroughly honest-hearted—he will never harbor ill-feeling against me for doing my duty. Still, I wish the expression weren't there. . . . Pshaw! I'm a fool!"

She completed her toilet and ordered her

breakfast sent to her room. Then she took the photograph in her hand and again perused it steadily, feature by feature, line by line. No matter how she reasoned with herself, she wished he did not look at her so.

Madge went out after breakfast. But she did not ride this time. With the flashy hat on her built-up hair and a cloak over her pink dress, she sauntered about the city in an apparently aimless fashion, chatting with anybody who chose to address her, but always taking good care of herself in any little bantering passage-at-arms that came her way. The brogue she adopted lent a pungency of its own to her repartee. Her pretty face—attractive in spite of the rouge and vulgar costume—made it easy for her to “pump” any one she pleased. By the time the sun went down she had added much valuable information to that gained the day before. And it concerned the man she was after.

She was glad to get to her rooms in the late afternoon for a rest. A pleasant, motherly woman was with her. This was Mrs. Billings, housekeeper of the hotel, and an old friend of Madge's. She knew the girl's profession.

Therefore she understood the purpose of her many disguises, and was always ready to help her slip in and out by a side door.

"You think you know where to find this soldier you want, do you, Miss Summers?" she asked, as she and Madge sat down to dinner together.

"Yes. I found out yesterday that a man answering to his general description was in the habit of dropping into Reilly's place, on the 'Barbary Coast,' two or three evenings a week. So I went to see Reilly, and got an engagement to sing there."

Mrs. Billings raised her two hands in admiration, at the same time shaking her head dubiously.

"It's wonderful how much pluck you have, dearie. But you always come through safely. I don't know how you do it. This Reilly's saloon has a very bad name. Aren't you afraid to go there alone?"

"Not at all," laughed Madge. "Nobody will hurt me. Reilly wouldn't let them, anyhow. He has known me for two years, and he does me the honor to regard me as a 'star' performer. I have sung for him before, and my

songs seem to suit the taste of his customers. So he was glad enough when I promised to-day that I would sing all this week. I don't think I shall have to stay longer than that."

"You mean that you think you will catch your deserter in that time?"

"I think so."

"Well, I am glad for your sake, because I know how anxious you always are to finish up. But I was hoping you might stay with us longer. When you get him, I suppose you will have to see him safely returned to his regiment, back in Kansas."

"That's the rule, Mrs. Billings," returned Madge. "But there are peculiar circumstances attending this case. They may keep me here some time. I have to be perfectly sure I am right before taking decided action."

"Don't you have to do that always?"

"Yes, to a certain extent. But this is different. However, I don't know much about it yet, and in the meantime we'll enjoy our dinner. It is very good of you to come up here and have it with me. I'm a stranger in San Francisco but for you."

"No one would think it when they see you

going around the city," smiled the housekeeper. "You seem to know everybody."

"That's only professionally. The people I speak to call me 'Madge.' They have never heard of Miss Summers, or, if they have, they don't associate me with her. What would become of my usefulness as a detective if they did?"

"I see. 'Madge' has hundreds of acquaintances, but Miss Summers is entirely without friends."

Madge reached across the little table to touch the housekeeper affectionately on the arm.

"No, Mrs. Billings. I am not without friends so long as I have you. And I don't want any others."

"Well, perhaps so—at present. But sooner or later a young man will come along—on horseback, most likely, for I am sure he will be a soldier and a cavalryman—and he will be the very best friend you can have. Depend upon it, Madge, a sweetheart, honest and true, is better than all the woman friends in creation. You'll find that out. At least, I hope so."

"Thank you for your good wishes, dear," laughed Madge. "But I have no idea of such a man, either on horseback or afoot. Even if such a one came, I am afraid I should be too busy to receive him with the graciousness he might think he deserved."

The housekeeper did not reply. But there was a knowing smile on her lips. She had heard girls talk in this way before. True, Madge Summers was different from many that she had known, in that her life seemed to have a deeper, sterner purpose than actuates most young women of her age. Still, she was a girl, after all, and, as such, to be won by the man who could do it.

The dinner was finished soon, and Madge prepared to go out. Mrs. Billings raised her eyebrows deprecatingly.

"I wish I could go with you," she said. "You are too pretty, even with all that paint on your face, to brave Reilly's by yourself. You ought to have a mother with you."

Something that might have been a tear trembled in Madge's eyes for an instant. But she winked hard and drove it away, as she replied, with a light laugh:

"Mrs. Billings, aren't you ashamed of yourself to suggest such a thing? As if I would take my mother into a place like Reilly's. I mean, if I had a mother. Why, it would be undutiful and disgraceful, to say nothing of the trouble I should have—looking after her."

"Yes. I suppose so," returned the housekeeper, with a sigh. "But I wish you didn't have to go, dear."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Billings. It's all business. And no one knows that better than Reilly."

The two went downstairs together—for Madge seldom used the elevator. At the side door to the street they parted.

Ten minutes later Reilly roared a boisterous welcome to Madge as she entered the low-ceiled, long room—a bar at one end and a piano at the other—where she had been engaged to sing every night for a week.

CHAPTER VI

ON ACTIVE SERVICE

IF Mrs. Billings had gone into Reilly's with Madge, she would have been confirmed in her opinion that it was not an eligible environment for a respectable young woman.

Although, thus early in the evening, the combination of groggery and concert hall was staid and quiet compared with what it would be a few hours later, there was a *décolleté* blatancy both in place and people which would have shocked the good housekeeper. It involved much drinking, more noise, and some piano music. A good half of the company were girls and women. They were always the most saddening element at Reilly's. Their loud dress, "fake" jewelry, and brazen gaiety proclaimed them really of the class to which Madge Summers only pretended to belong.

In one party of four, at a small table, making more racket than any of the others, were

two sailors who had just been paid off at the end of a long voyage on a "wind-jammer" in the South American trade. With them were two young women. The life was telling on these girls. They looked as if they might have been in their thirties; neither had seen a twentieth birthday.

In a corner near the piano crouched one of those sodden creatures whom one always associates with an atmosphere of stale beer. The thing had been a man once. Now he was a pitiful, shrinking animal, watching furtively for any free drinks that might come his way. He was an institution at Reilly's. He earned the little food he required by helping to sweep out, cleaning foul utensils and doing other menial work too unpleasant for the Chinese porter. In consideration of these tasks, he was permitted to doze in the saloon through the evenings until closing time. He had no other home.

Madge shuddered as her eye fell upon this wastrel. She decided that he had been not bad-looking once. Simultaneously she thought of the handsome young soldier whose photograph she carried in her bosom. *He* was disposed to

drink unwisely. Could it be that ever *he* would come to look like this wretched being cowering behind the piano?

Not if he were taken back to his regiment. There, among his comrades and with the healthful demands of his duties as a soldier upon him, he must always maintain a certain standard. He would, she knew. Officers might drink sometimes. But only sometimes, and always they were restrained by the knowledge that the honor of the *corps* was in their hands. No; this young lieutenant, Jim Craig, was in danger, but he could be saved, and his reclamation was in her hands.

Madge felt an uplift in her soul as she came to this conclusion. She could not have explained why. There was no logical reason why she should be more interested in this deserter than she had been in many others. Well, if not, there must have been an illogical one, for the added interest certainly was there.

Dan Reilly was a square-built, red-faced man, with a fighting jaw and huge hands. These last were necessary for the successful conduct of his business. When any of his guests became obstreperous, Reilly could—and

often did—lift them bodily and throw them into the street. He had been known to take a fighting “drunk” in each hand, and carry them both out, squirming and swearing, together. Seldom had he occasion to strike with his fists. And for a very good reason. He had been a professional pugilist and wrestler in his time, and a man must be either very bold, or extremely drunk, or both, to offer serious resistance when Reilly decided to eject him.

“You’re here in good time, Madge,” he said, grinning at her across the bar. “There won’t be much doin’ for an hour or two, but you might spiel us a song. It will liven things up.”

“All right, Dan. That’s what I’m here for.”

She swaggered down the room, exchanging jesting remarks with the people seated at the tables. Her brogue was much in evidence, and she smiled with a flippant good-humor that is always popular in such places as Reilly’s. But she was not so careless as she seemed. There was not a man to whom she flung a laughing word that she did not scrutinize from head to foot. In one flash she took in every feature, every detail of his size, build and weight, from

the top of his greasy old hat to the soles of his worn shoes. She did not trouble much about the women. Nevertheless, she could have given a description of any of them a month afterward accurate enough to please the police. A passing glance did that.

"Well, he's not here yet," she said to herself, as she gave the starved-looking man at the piano a friendly thump on the back. "Hello, Scroggs, old pard! How's it been going with you since I seen you last?"

Scroggs' thin, pale face cracked into a mournful smile as he looked up. He was in the midst of a ragtime two-step, and could not stop. Most of the men and some of the women were beating time with feet and fingers. They would have resented a break in their aesthetic enjoyment.

"I'm glad to see you, Madge," he piped, through the music. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Tearing things up in the East," she answered, with a shrug. "But I can't keep away from good old San Fran for long at a time. I see there's about the same old crowd here, except for the men from the ships."

"Yes, but there'll be others later in the evening. There's lots of strangers every night. Sailors, soldiers——"

"Many soldiers?" interrupted Madge.

"Quite a few. They come in from the fort whenever they get leave. There'll be a bunch of 'em to-night, no doubt."

"Not many strange soldiers, I suppose?"

"Sure not!" replied Scroggs. "Where would they come from?"

"That's so. Where *would* they come from?"

"Go ahead there, Madge," roared Reilly, from the back of the bar. "Sing something!"

"All right, Dan!" she flung back. "Don't get excited. It might turn your hair red."

As Reilly's hair was of a decidedly sunset hue, this sally brought forth a yell of laughter, and one of the girls with the sailors shouted:

"The drinks are on you, Mr. Reilly."

"Don't get fresh there, you!" growled Reilly. "Or I'm li'ble to——"

Scroggs thumped loudly on the piano and drowned out the threat, whatever it was. He often prevented trouble by this trick. It is not easy for people to quarrel while somebody is hammering out fortissimo chords on a full-

grown piano. Scroggs did not stop till Madge shouted in his ear :

"That'll do, Scroggs. I'll give them 'Dreaming of My Happy, Happy Home!'"

Scroggs deftly rippled over the prelude, and Madge began to sing. The "happy home" affair was one of those tearful domestic ballads that are always favorites with people who might be supposed to have outlived all sentiment. There was absolute silence as Madge sang two verses in her rich, full voice. The words were set to a melody that seemed to have been composed by the yard, and then cut off in lengths to fit the verses.

But words and music both affected the audience. Before Madge had finished, the two girls with the sailors were weeping into their beer, the other women were all more or less subdued, while the men coughed and swore softly to relieve their feelings. The homeless waif behind the piano had fallen asleep.

"Now whoop up something lively, Madge," bellowed Reilly, as the applause died down.

"I will in a minute," returned Madge. "But I want a little rest between songs. We opera singers have to be careful of our voices."

"Sure!" assented a tough-looking fellow who had been particularly loud in his applause.

"Have a drink, Madge."

"Not just now, thanks."

"Oh, you don't mean that," broke in one of the sailors. "Come on! Join us in a ball, won't you? Sit down here until you're ready to sing again. Hey, Reilly! Madge wants a drink."

"I told you no," she interposed firmly. "I'm not thirsty."

Reilly frowned. He came from behind the bar and walked down the room to Madge.

"Look here, my girl," he said in a low tone. "Your singing is all right——"

"Then that's all," she interrupted. "My singing is what you pay me for, isn't it?"

"Not altogether," he growled. "I expect my people to help trade when they can. When a man asks you to drink, take him up. Understand?"

There was a dangerous glint in her eyes, as she replied steadily:

"No, I do *not* understand."

"Well, then, I'll tell you straight, so that you will. My business here is to sell booze. It isn't giving me a square deal when you dis-

courage a man from spending money. I like you, and I know you are not the kind that—that—these others are,” with a sweep of his hand to take in the whole room. “But that doesn’t excuse you for spoiling trade.”

“My singing brings business. You’ve told me so many times.”

“I’m not talking about your singing,” was his impatient rejoinder.

“Well, *I am*. Now let me alone, or I’ll walk right out and never come back.”

“Don’t do that!” begged Reilly, his bullying tone suddenly changed to a whine. “I’ve told everybody you’ll sing here all the week. You wouldn’t want me to disappoint my customers, would you? There’ll be a big crowd to-night.”

“You heard what I said.”

She turned away and moved over to the piano. Reilly looked at her in uncertainty for a moment. He was not accustomed to being snubbed in his own place. Then, as Madge took no further notice of him, he went back to the bar and found fault with a bartender for not washing a glass properly.

Reilly did not interfere with Madge any more that evening. She trolled forth songs at

intervals until past midnight. Then she calmly announced that she would give one more and quit.

This was taking a liberty that no hired singer in Reilly's had ever ventured on in the history of the place. The proprietor opened his eyes wide and was about to protest. He met the gaze of Madge as she took her place on the platform by the side of the piano, and—changed his mind.

Only, when Madge had finished the song, and after she had acknowledged the applause and declined several invitations to drink, he beckoned her over to the bar.

"Say, Madge," he said quietly. "What kind of game is this? The evening ain't over yet. Not by a jugful. I keep the doors open till one o'clock, and things are running long after that usually. Yet you say you're going to beat it at twelve, and, what's more, you *do* beat it."

"Well?"

There was no compromise in her tone. Reilly passed one of his hamlike hands across his mouth. Then, with a forced grin:

"Nothing, if you want to do it. But you'll come to-morrow night, I suppose?"

"Of course I will. I always keep my contracts. You know that. Good night."

Once outside, she walked only a few yards before she stopped and drew a deep breath.

"How sweet it is, after that poisoned air!" she murmured. "How I loathe this life of mine sometimes! To go into that filthy place every night and mix with those horrible people, just to make a prisoner of a man whom I have never seen. Perhaps I shall hate him when I do see him! What nonsense that is. As if my hating or liking him had anything to do with it! He will be like all the others. I shall pity him—and hold him tight when once I get my hands on him."

But when she reached her little sitting-room at the hotel she took out Jim Craig's photograph and studied it for an hour before she went to bed.

CHAPTER VII

A SKIRMISH

ALTHOUGH Madge was not required to be at Reilly's until eight o'clock at night, she was not idle until that hour.

There was plenty for her to do in the daytime.

In the two days she had already spent in traveling about the city, she learned that a man whom she believed to be Jim Craig was in the habit of spending his evenings at Reilly's. This information had come to her piecemeal. An item here, a scrap there, and a bit of personal description somewhere else. Skillfully she had fitted the fragments to each other, until she had a fine picture of the man she wanted, together with a chart of his daily doings for the past month.

She had not learned all she wanted to know, however. There were gaps in the structure she had built up. No one could tell her where

Jim Craig (if it was he) lived. He appeared at Reilly's nearly every evening, it was said, and generally stayed till past midnight. He had been noticeable because he hardly ever spoke to anybody, but just sat at a table, drinking. When he was ready to go he said "Good night" to Scroggs, the pianist, and staggered out. Madge's informants all agreed that he never left Reilly's sober. His name was understood to be Jim.

As Madge sat over her solitary breakfast the next morning, she wondered why he had not been at Reilly's the night before. Could she have been unlucky enough to come just too late? Had he left San Francisco on the day that she arrived? If so, she would have to take up a new trail. In any case, she must go about the city and see what she could learn. The successful detective must be indefatigable.

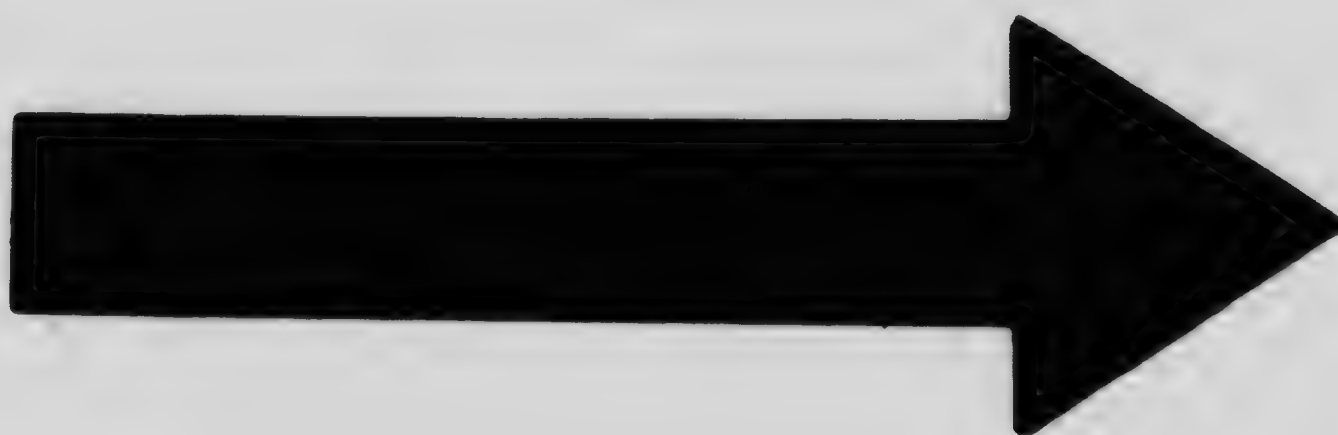
But when she appeared at Reilly's at sundown, there was nothing in her demeanor or appearance to suggest that she had been working hard all day. She laughed, joked and sang as energetically as on the previous night. The proprietor was delighted. He did the largest business his place had seen for months. Madge

was a big drawing card, and he did not venture to hint to her again that she should help trade by drinking. Reilly was shrewd. He knew when to let well enough alone.

Madge was not satisfied, however. Jim Craig had not come in. Yet he was still in the city. She had assured herself of that during the day. Why he had abandoned his favorite evening resort she could not conjecture. It could not be because *she* was there. He did not know her, and Madge was sure no one about the place, from the proprietor down, suspected that she was a detective.

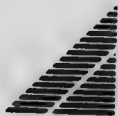
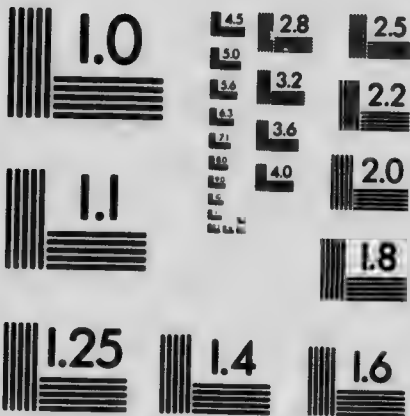
For three nights Madge sang at Reilly's, and still "Jim" did not come. In her strolls about the streets and into places of the Reilly kind during each day, she heard of him now and then. But she never caught up with him.

This "Jim" was a marked man in a way. His manners and speech were not those of the underworld, although he chose to tread its paths. A few of the men and women who habitually slink through city shadows, making their living in heaven knows what evil ways, had dubbed him "Gentleman Jim." But not to his face. Madge heard that he had thrashed one



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exuberant individual—a pickpocket and “second-story man” by profession—who had presumed to address him thus in a public place.

He had told the pickpocket afterward, over a conciliatory drink, that he would not “stand for” any “frills” on his name. If people wanted to call him “Jim,” he had no objection. But he was no more a “gentleman” than the rest of them, and no man who wanted to be “in right” with him would say he was.

“Everything I hear about this ‘Jim’ makes me believe he is my man,” Madge was saying to herself as she prepared to leave the hotel on the fourth evening. “Why he doesn’t come to Reilly’s, when he has been so regular up till this week, I can’t imagine. But, so long as he is in the city, it is pretty certain he will be there eventually. If not, I may run against him in the daytime. There’s only a faint chance of that, however. It isn’t often he is seen about the streets.”

As she entered Reilly’s on this fourth night, the sordidity of it all depressed her. She wondered how men could hang about there regularly and seem to like it. They did not come

for business, either. It is true they were ready to "turn a trick" if occasion should arise. But if there were no "mark" to be "trimmed," why, they were content to spend the evening without pecuniary profit, and refer to it afterward as a "good time." The women? Well, Reilly's was a good stamping-ground for them.

"Yes," muttered Madge. "It's in these foul places they find their customers. Poor creatures! No wonder their average lifetime in this kind of thing is less than five years!"

It was not Madge's nature to look at the shadowy side of things for long, however. By the time she had reached the piano and greeted Scroggs with her usual slap on the back, she was as gay as even Dan Reilly could desire. From the platform, some eight inches above the floor, she glanced about the room. She always did that as soon as she arrived.

"He isn't here," she thought. "Well, he *must* come at some time or other."

Scroggs played the prelude to a stupid, but tuneful, ditty, that was popular just then, beginning with "Oh, Mr. Bluebeard, I'm terribly stuck on you," and looked up at her. She

nodded and swung off into the song recklessly. Reilly threw her a kiss from his place behind the bar.

At the end, when the thumps and howls of appreciation had died away, the thin voice of a pale-faced, hollow-eyed girl at a table near the piano reached Madge:

"Where's little Dutchy to-night, Reddy?"

She was speaking to a stocky young man, with a cap pulled over his eyes, who sat with her. He replied casually:

"Dutchy: Oh, he won't be here. He's pinched."

"What for?"

"Caught with the goods. Then he stuck a cop in the neck, trying to make his get-away. The cop just rolled over and passed out right there."

"Killed him?" put in Madge.

Reddy looked at her in pained surprise that she should ask so absurd a question.

"Killed him? Sure he killed him. There can't be no alibi nor nothin' like that for Dutchy, neither. It's dead open and shut, and he'll get first degree at the trial, without no chance of appeal nor nothin'."

"That's terrible," said Madge. "Do you suppose they'll hang him? That boy?"

"Bet your life they will! What else can they do? And it was a pal squealed on him, too."

"A pal? Some one he trusted?"

"Sure! If that guy hadn' told the cop where Dutchy was and what he was doing, there wouldn't have been no scrap, and the cop'd be alive to-night."

"And a cowardly sneak has brought his pal to the gallows!" said Madge slowly. "Why, I wouldn't have the death of a man on my soul if he'd committed a dozen murders. No matter what the law might say, if I knew where a man who had killed another was hiding, I'd help him to get away. I would, by all that's holy. They might do what they liked to me afterward."

Reddy got up from the table, stuck his cap a little more over one eye, and swaggered to the platform. He held out his hand to Madge.

"Say, Madge, I want to shake. Get that? And I want to do it because you're—you're—*white!*"

Reddy—his specialty was "strong-arm"

work—took Madge's hand, which she put out to him, and gripped it hard. Then he repeated his conviction, "You're white, Madge," and went back to his table with the air of a man who was rather proud of himself and his sentiments.

"What about the 'Suwanee River,' Madge?" suggested Scroggs, in a business-like tone.

He played the opening strains and Madge began to sing. It was a song she loved, and she threw into Foster's touching melody all the expression that her voice would yield.

As was so generally the case when she gave anything tender, there was not a sound in the room except her sweet, clear tones and the soft piano accompaniment. Scroggs took a musician's delight in the ballad, and his playing was in thorough harmony with the vocalist.

The second stanza had just begun, when the music was drowned in a loud noise in the street.

It was a disturbance such as is not uncommon on the "Barbary Coast." Vile language—shouted, roared, and shrieked up and down the gamut of angry excitement, by women, as well as men. The thud and slap of blows, the

scuffling of many feet, and through it all the inarticulate howling of a mob brutalized by a strife in which all regard for fair play was lost in the wild desire to rend, tear, and kill.

The commotion increased as the participants came nearer. At last, with a bang, the two wicker half-doors of the saloon flew open, and a big hulking fellow, with a black mustache, and wearing a rough blue flannel shirt and brown overalls, tumbled in head first and sprawled on the floor. As the spring doors slammed shut, he scrambled to his feet and ran to the bar.

What had caused the big fellow to dive into Reilly's was soon revealed. A well-built young man, rather poorly dressed, but who did not look like a laborer, dashed the doors open and tried to hurl himself upon the giant in the brown overalls.

Dan Reilly was too quick for him, however. Accustomed to sudden outbreaks of this nature, he seized the pursuer and held him back, fuming and raging.

Everybody in the room rushed forward. If there was anything the regular patrons of Reilly's did enjoy, it was a smashing good

fight. It mattered little what might be the *casus belli*. The thing to them was the battle itself—the swift interchange of blows and kicks; the splendid ferocity of a “rough-and-tumble,” in which “everything goes, with no holts barred.”

If Reilly had not taken such prompt measures to halt the engagement, there is no doubt that the tall teamster—for that is what he proved to be—would have been knocked down again. The young man tried hard to break away from those holding him back, as he shouted:

“Let me get at that big brute! Take your hands off me, I tell you! By heaven, I’ll kill him!”

“What did he do?”

It was Madge asking this question. With the others, she had forced her way into the thick of the trouble.

“Do? Why he kicked his horse as hard as he could! That’s what he did! Kicked him underneath, with his heavy boot. The horse almost doubled up with the pain. Let go of me! I’ll give him more than he gave the horse. I will, by——”

"Drop it!" ordered Reilly. "Shut up, will you? I won't have no fighting here to-night. Do you want to get pinched? Simmer down, I tell you."

Reilly expressed himself with rather more than ordinary feeling. He had been fined fifty dollars only the week before on account of a brawl, which, beginning in his place and boiling over into the street, had swelled into a riot. Not only had a fine been imposed, but the magistrate had threatened to have his saloon and concert license taken away the next time. That was what frightened Reilly. Otherwise he would not have cared if the teamster, or his assailant, or both, had been killed. But to lose his license! That was an awful possibility.

"Here, now! What's all this!" suddenly broke in a loud, official voice.

It was Mulligan, policeman on the beat. As he ran in, he grabbed the belligerent young man by the elbow, swinging him half around. Then he looked at the proprietor for an explanation.

"It's all right, Mulligan," said Reilly quickly. "Just a little misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding nothing!" yelled the young man, struggling to free himself from Reilly on one side and the policeman on the other. "I gave that fellow part of what he deserved, and he'll get the rest as soon as I can get near him. I'll go to 'mill' for the sake of another crack at him."

"Be jabers! That's where ye will go if ye don't be quitting yer foolishness," declared Mulligan severely. "Reilly, I'd hate to arrest him in your place, so I would. But you'll have to make this lad behave himself."

"Ah, now, Mr. Officer," interrupted Madge, with a sympathizing glance at the prisoner. "Sure ye wouldn't be after pinching the boy for a bit of a scrap, would ye?"

Her brogue was more pronounced than usual. Perhaps it was put on for the benefit of Mulligan. At all events, it had its effect, for a relenting twinkle came into his eye.

"Yes, that's all very well," he stammered. "But——"

"Ah, faith, an' didn't I know it?" laughed Madge. "Sure it's Irish ye are yourself. A fine fighting man ye are, too. Any one can see that with half an eye. As for this lad

here, I'll be answerable for him, so I will. Give him to me."

"Are ye going to quit fighting, if I let ye go?" demanded Mulligan of his prisoner.

The young man seemed inclined to refuse the offer of liberty on these terms. But before he could speak, Madge answered for him:

"Of course, he will. Sure he's given me his word with his eyes. Take your hands off him, both you and Mr. Reilly, and you'll see."

CHAPTER VIII

"BOOTS AND SADDLES"

MADGE was taking a chance when she pledged herself for the stranger's good behavior. But she was used to risks in her business. Moreover, there was something in his face—even distorted by anger as it was—that told her she was safe. This man would not dishonor her personal guarantee. She was sure of that.

Still it was not easy for the avenger to drop hostilities all at once. For a few seconds he scowled at the burly teamster by the bar, and his fingers twitched. He would like to have sent in one more good, clean punch. But he fought down the temptation, and, turning his back, walked slowly down the room.

"Be the powers, ye've made him quit, ye little divil!" said Mulligan to Madge. "But I don't believe a man could have done it."

"It wasn't a man's job, officer 'er,"

laughed Madge. "Only women have any right to spoil a fair fight. And why not? It's generally one of 'em as causes it, and, be the same token, they should bring it to an end when they think it's gone far enough. How's that, Mr. Reilly? What do *you* think?"

"It listens good," replied the saloonkeeper. Then, turning to the teamster, who, sulkily defiant, had been fenced in at the bar by Reddy and one of the sailors, he growled: "You get out of here, Pete."

"That's what!" added Mulligan. "Get home to your wife. She'll finish the job the lad over there begun."

"And don't come here again," ordered Reilly. "I don't want men that kick horses in my place. Now, beat it!"

The teamster, finding himself decidedly unpopular, slunk out, evidently glad to get away without further personal damage. Mulligan went over to the young man and touched him on the shoulder.

"Betune ourselves—not officially, ye understand—I think ye done right to lick that big stiff. Pete Bannon his name is. This ain't the first time I've knowed him abuse a horse.

Only a month ago I dusted him with me club and ran him in for the same thing. I'd have done it ag'in av I'd seen him kick the poor crayture, so I would. Now, I leave ye in the charge of me deputy, who'll have to kape ye in order."

"Do you mean me, officer darlint?" asked Madge.

"Of course, I do. Who else *would* I mean? Good night to ye, ye little divil!"

"Good night, Mr. Mulligan."

Madge accompanied her adieu with a smile and sly wink. It made Mulligan twirl his club jauntily by its leather thong as he went out. He also executed a sort of jig-step of which he was never guilty except when very well pleased.

It did not take long for the saloon to resume its accustomed tranquillity. When once a scrap was ended, there was no use "chewing the rag" over it. This was an article of faith rarely transgressed. A *blasé* composure was considered the proper attitude of those who sought relief from worldly stress in the cloistered retirement of Reilly's. So, when the young man who had "soaked" big Pete seated

himself quietly at a table near the piano and motioned to a bartender for a beer, he dropped from the general notice as if he never had been.

The beer was brought, but before the young man could get the money out of his pocket to hand it to the bartender, Reilly interfered:

"No, you can't pay for that. It's on the house. You put a crimp in our peaceful evening, to be sure. But you knocked out Black Pete, and that's good for a drink any day."

"He may thank his bull luck I didn't kill him. The brute!" was the reply. "Well, I'll drink your health."

"Thanks!"

And thus were Dan Reilly and the vanquisher of Black Pete encompassed by the snowy wings of the dove of peace, in the odor of sanctity—and beer.

Madge took her place on the platform and whispered something to the pianist. The industrious Scroggs dashed off the introduction to a pastoral much favored at Reilly's, the burden of which was "I've waited, honey, long for you."

Madge fixed her gaze upon the face of the

young man whom Reilly had made an honored guest, and sang this effusion directly at him. He did not seem to notice it. He may have felt the significance of the refrain. "I've waited long for you." But, if so, he did not betray his thoughts. Evidently he admired the singer. There was nothing to indicate that he applied the words to himself.

After sipping his beer in compliment to his host, he did not touch the glass again. But when Madge came over to his table and sat down, he was mindful of the rigid etiquette of Reilly's. He asked her if she would have a drink. She declined, with a smile. She was not thirsty, she said.

"I suppose I ought to thank you for saving me from the cops just now," he said.

"Indeed, and it's me should be thanking you for punching that brute of a man. Kicking his horse, was he? Faith, I could lick him myself, so I could."

In her earnestness, the gray eyes of her flashed like points of polished steel. Her brogue—which her listener found more musical than he had ever thought the Celtic twang

could be—gave added force to her indignation. She meant what she said. Black Pete would have realized that if she had had him there just then.

The young man looked at her slight frame and smiled dubiously.

"I don't doubt your pluck. But I'm afraid I couldn't bet my money on you against a two-hundred-pounder like Black Pete."

"You mustn't judge by appearances," she rejoined. "I've got the best of it in many a bout."

Something in the significant way she said this made her companion look at her quickly. He asked seriously, with a sudden change from his bantering tone of a moment before:

"What's your name?"

"Madge."

"Ma'dge what?" he persisted.

She shrugged her shoulders and hummed a waltz Scroggs was playing to fill in between songs.

"No matter. One name is enough down here."

Again he studied her girlish figure and

pretty face—a face that seemed to be outraged by the rouge and powder—and said softly:

“You were different—once? Weren’t you?”

“Maybe. What’s *your* name? What am I to call you?”

“Jim,” he replied, snapping out the word as if he were biting it. “As you say, one name’s enough down here.”

“You’ve been a soldier, haven’t you?”

He rose suddenly from his chair, but sat down again immediately. There was a hoarse note in his voice that told he was on the defensive, as he demanded:

“Why should you think that?”

“Well, you walk like one, and you sit like one, well forward on your chair, with your feet squarely on the floor, instead of lolling back, as most men do. Then I heard you say just now that you’d ‘go to mill’ for the sake of getting another crack at Black Pete. Down here we say ‘get pinched.’ That ‘go to mill’ is soldier talk through and through. I know, because my brother was a soldier.”

“Oh, he was? You mean he isn’t now? Served his time and discharged, I suppose?”

"No."

"H'm! Deserter, eh?"

"Not so bad as that. He's dead."

"Oh!"

"He went to the Philippines. Bad luck to the place! He got the fever out there. That's why I hate the army, and all that belongs to it."

"Well, you needn't hate me for that reason," he said, with a grim laugh. "I'm not an army man."

"But you know how to fight."

"Fight? Oh, you mean Black Pete. Yes, I can fight."

"And you love horses. I can tell that because it made you just crazy when you saw one ill-treated."

He frowned at the thought of the horse's suffering. Then he smiled as he looked at her and absorbed a little flame from her vivid spirit. There is something in a man's eyes which tells a woman when he has become really conscious of her personality, when he feels her proximity and influence, and when the way is clear for her to interest or fascinate him.

When Madge caught that first faint gleam

—ah! and well she knew it!—she realized that her cue had come. And she leaned her bare elbows on the table and talked more earnestly than ever. She shaded off her brogue almost imperceptibly, dropping into it now and again, as most Irish persons do when they are interested. And the sombre gray eyes of the man flashed as he drew warmth and light from her words and was carried away by the changeful, brilliant, gracious ways of her that made her so dangerous—and so sweet!

“Did you leave Ireland on a broomstick?” he asked.

“Sure. And I ride it yet o’ nights, over the house-tops—houp-la!—straight up to the moon!”

“Won’t you take me along some time? I’d like to try the moon. I’m about sick of this globe.”

“Whisper! The moon’s no better. ’Tis peopled with—*ghosts!*”

“Ghosts?”

“Yes, sure! The sins of saints, and the good deeds of sinners, and such-like specters.”

She broke off to look toward the piano, where Scroggs was signaling her.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I must sing again."

"Will you come back afterward?"

"No. I don't think I shall have time. When I have sung one or two more I must be off to my broomstick! 'Tis growin' restive up beyant!"

She left him laughing. But when she had sung once she did come back to him.

"I guess I have a little time," she said. "And I felt as if I wanted to tell you again how glad I am you licked Black Pete. Sure you were crazy mad at him, weren't you?"

"Who wouldn't be crazy at such a thing as that?" he growled. "If you'd seen that great brute kick——"

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted. "But that's all over. You licked him, anyhow. How is it I haven't seen you here before this week?"

"I stay away from saloons as much as I can. But I get so lonesome in this town that I have to go where there's a little life sometimes. I don't know any livelier place than Reilly's. I was just coming in when I saw that fellow abusing his horse."

"Don't you ever drink anything stronger than beer?"

"Yes, but I shouldn't."

"I see."

He turned on her angrily.

"You see? What do you see? What do you mean?"

"My! What are you flying off the handle like that for? I didn't mean anything except that I suppose whisky is too much for you. It is for some men. Makes them do things they'd never think of if they were in their right senses."

He seemed about to say something in apology for his sudden flaming up, when the cracked tones of a very badly played bugle echoed through the room. The piano happened to be silent just then. Jim started as he heard the bugle. Involuntarily his shoulders went back and he sat rigidly in his chair, as if ready for a call to "Attention!"

Madge watched him narrowly. Her laughing face had become grave, with an expression of keen speculation. If Jim had been looking at her, he must have noted the transformation.

"That's Toots, the knife-grinder," she remarked, in an off-hand manner, after a pause. "He's around here every night with that old horn of his. That was '*reveille*' he was trying to play, wasn't it?"

"No. 'Boots and saddles!'"

His head had dropped upon his hands, his elbows resting on the table. That he had forgotten where he was for the moment was obvious. He did not seem to be conscious even of the presence of Madge. He had answered her query mechanically. Then he muttered to himself:

"'Boots and saddles!' 'Boots and saddles!'"

Toots had presumed to come inside the saloon to blow a blast on his bugle. The two bartenders, under Reilly's orders, were about to throw him out.

"Oh, don't hurt the poor devil!" protested Jim, rousing himself. "He isn't doing any harm, is he? There's worse music than a bugle."

"That may be," rejoined Reilly. "But everything in its place, and this ain't no army parade ground. We've got all the music we

want of our own. Go ahead, Scroggs! Get busy! We'll have another song. Won't we, honey?"

The last sentence was addressed to Madge, who was thoughtfully regarding Jim. She walked over to the piano, where Scroggs was polishing the keys with his handkerchief. As he polished he sighed wearily. The girl noticed it.

"What's the matter, Scroggs? You look pretty well all in?"

He smiled and took his seat at the instrument with his usual patient willingness.

"I'm a little tired and hungry. That's all. I'd be all right if I had a cup of coffee and a couple of sandwiches. I didn't have time for supper."

"Why don't you go out and get something?"

"I can't. I'm paid by the hour, and I need every cent I can make. I'll get along till we close up. Then I'll snatch a bite before I go to bed. What'll you sing next?"

But Madge was not to be put off. She knew the pianist was wretchedly paid. Also she had heard, somewhere or somehow, that there was a Mrs. Scroggs, and that she was in poor

health. Medicine is expensive. When it must be bought regularly every week it becomes a heavy burden on a man who earns very little money. This is not all, either. There are extras, in the way of food and drink, which ordinarily would be luxuries, but which are necessities to an invalid. There is practically no limit to what these may cost.

Of all this Madge was cognizant, and it made her angry on behalf of Scroggs. As she looked around, seeking some way to assist him, she caught the eye of the man, Jim, who had corrected her so quickly when she had mistaken the bugle call, "Boots and saddles," for "Reveille."

His response to her unspoken appeal was immediate.

"Here, I'll help you out, old man," he called to Scroggs. "You get along to your grub."

Scroggs hesitated, fingering his sheet music nervously. The money he got for playing at Reilly's was very important to him.

"That's all right," continued Jim, gently pushing him aside. "I can play the piano—well enough to hold your job till you get back. Go on, now! Melt away!"

"Hello! New professor, eh?" exclaimed Reilly. "What are your terms, professor?"

"You haven't any objections, have you?" asked Jim, taking his seat and running his fingers over the keys with the ease of one used to the instrument.

"Not a one, if the ladies and gents will stand for it. Always like a novelty myself."

"Then here's one."

With a laugh, he began to play "My Old Kentucky Home." That he was a true musician was proved before he had finished half a dozen measures. When he had gone through the melody to the very end, refrain and all, a loud sob from the poor, beer-soaked drudge—the man who did the sweeping out—made him stop suddenly.

"Look here, you!" roared Reilly, advancing on the waif. "Make another break like that and you are barred from this place from now on. Get that?"

"Oh, let him alone, Reilly," interposed Madge. "He couldn't help it. I came near doing a weep myself. I always do when I hear that tune. Here! I'll give you something

different. 'Sailing!' How's that? Can you play it—Jim?"

"Yes. I know the song."

Into the rollicking composition she dashed headlong, after a few bars of prelude. Everybody joined in the chorus, and the pianist rattled off an accompaniment that Scroggs could not have done better. Just as the song ended he returned. Jim got up at once, and the regular pianist dropped into his place. He was in much better spirits after his sandwiches and coffee.

For the short remainder of the evening Jim sat near the piano, but he did not play again. At midnight Madge announced that she was going home. He asked for permission to see her safely to her door. She refused him almost rudely. That was something she never allowed any one to do, she said. She could find her way home by herself.

He looked at her curiously, as if trying to read her secret. From the beginning he had felt sure she did not belong to the "Barbary Coast."

"Are you going on your broomstick?" he asked softly.

"Yes. It's waiting for me outside. Good night."

He did not go out till she had been gone several minutes. Somehow, she knew he wouldn't, even though she looked about to make sure he was nowhere in sight when she slipped in at the side door of her hotel.

Once in her room, Madge locked the door and went to the telephone. With some difficulty she got Western Union on the wire. Then she dictated a message, to be sent by telegraph, "rush," to Colonel Parsons at the army post in far-away Kansas. It was as follows:

"Think have our man. Send some one to identify at once.—M. SUMMERS."

CHAPTER IX

"TO THE COLORS!"

MADGE felt that she had done her duty when she sent this telegram, signed "M. Summers," to Colonel Parsons. There was no doubt in her mind that "Jim," the man who had thrashed Black Pete and afterward played the piano, was the deserter, Lieutenant James Craig.

It had been arranged, before she left the post in Kansas, that she should telegraph as soon as she had run down her man. Then some officer of the regiment would hurry to her and confront the fugitive. Well, she had caught the man and telegraphed. She had obeyed orders to the letter.

Why, then, did she sit at her table, cheek in hand, gazing at the photograph of Jim Craig, for more than an hour after she had "rung off" at the telephone? What reason for those dry sobs at intervals? Why, at last,

did tears run down and drop on the picture before she could intercept them with angry dabs of her handkerchief? What did her murmur of "Poor lad! Poor lad!" signify? In a word, why did she behave as if she were racked by grief and bitter disappointment—she who had brought her work to so brilliant an issue.

She got up and locked the photograph in her trunk. Then, with savage haste, she removed the rouge, the powder and the paint from her cheeks, forehead and eyebrows, and tore off the tinseled pink frock. It was not until she was in the modest dressing-gown which she always wore in her room that she became calm.

"After all, I am doing it for his good," she told herself. "He is unhappy. That anybody can see. Once let him get back into the wholesome routine of the garrison, and he will be his own man again."

Madge had seen such cases before—that is, cases like it in a way. It is true she could not recall one in which she had felt the same personal concern. But that was merely a detail. The underlying fact was that every deserter

she ever had captured was grateful to her afterward.

That was all very well, but——

How she wished she could be sure that Lieutenant James Craig *would* be grateful when she handed him over to the squad of soldiers who would eventually march him into the presence of his commanding officer! He *should* be grateful. But—would he? In theory there could be no question that he—an educated, intelligent man, loyal to his flag and country—would rejoice when he found how easy it was to rehabilitate himself. In practice it must be an experiment.

It was not always that experiments were successful. She was obliged to admit that. Then she remembered the almost angry way in which he had declared that he was not in the army. He had said it as if the very thought was repugnant. Of course, his latest military associations had not been pleasant. When one has struck one's superior officer and run away, the recollection is not likely to be agreeable. All Madge could hope for was that this would fade from his mind. Then his gratification at being again an honest man,

under the old flag, would outweigh everything else.

In the morning her first thought was that she must spend two more evenings at Reilly's before the officer, whoever he might be, would arrive to say that she had made no mistake in pointing out this "Jim" as Lieutenant James Craig. On both these evenings there was a likelihood—practically a certainty—that he would be there. If he were, they would talk to each other. Would she be at her ease with him, knowing that she had sent that telegram? She decided she would. Why shouldn't she? An army detective must not be squeamish.

That evening Jim did not appear at Reilly's till late. He sauntered in quietly and unobtrusively. There was none of the melodramatic hurly-burly of the night before, when Black Pete involuntarily heralded his coming by turning a somersault through the doorway.

Madge saw him as soon as he entered, but she did not meet his eye. He took a seat not far from the piano and stared moodily in turn at everybody else in the room. Madge decided that he was trying to avoid her. Also

she knew intuitively that he would have talked to her, only that, for some reason, he was afraid. Soon he gave an order to one of the bartenders, who at Reilly's were also waiters. She observed that whisky, not beer, was brought. He drank it down and ordered more.

"He's no business to be drinking whisky," thought Madge. "If he doesn't stop that soon, I shall have to go and make him."

She turned over the music on the piano nervously. Then she looked at Jim again. He was frowning thoughtfully at the table.

"I suppose Reilly would say I was spoiling trade again. And, after all, what is it to me what this man drinks? He is not under my care in that way. All I am expected to do is to have him here when an officer from the post comes to identify him. Whether he is drunk or sober makes no difference!"

There were cries for a song, and Madge chose the first thing that came to hand. It was "Mavourneen." She was always safe in giving the company a ballad of Ireland, and this one was a particular favorite.

Scroggs played it with the uninterested cor-

rectness that marked his work when he was tired. He was master of his instrument, and at such times it mattered not to him whether it were Haydn or Harris, Chopin or Cohan, Brahms or Baldwin Sloane. All he asked was that the music be set before him. His adroit fingers did the rest.

Through this song and several others Jim sat silent at his table. Not once did he look in her direction, neither did he touch his second glass of whisky. If Madge had not been a deeper student of man's nature than most young women of her age, she might have thought he was nursing his anger because she had not allowed him to see her home on the previous night. But she knew better than that. She was not over-vain, but if there were not an ache in that man's heart which responded to one in her own, then the sweet instinct that has warned women of the presence of love in all ages had entirely misled her.

Why she thrilled simply at the presence of this rather morose runaway soldier she had not been able to explain, even after many hours of self-communion. He was no hand-

somer than several other men whom she, in the exercise of her calling, had run down and snared, and he had not won her by doing anything that could be called really heroic. Any able-bodied patron of Reilly's might have knocked down Black Pete. He played the piano pretty well; but Scroggs did it better. He was not over-agreeable in his manners, and, judging by all she had seen and heard of him, he was cursed with an ungovernable temper. What was in him, then, that made her feel like a traitor, when, in truth, she was proving her loyalty to the army she loved, to the flag she revered?

"How simple it all might be if he could only give me his confidence. Then——"

She laughed bitterly as she reached this point in her reflections.

"Why should he place confidence in me? To him I'm only a singer in a low saloon in the worst quarter of a large city! A decent man doesn't open his heart to such a woman as he supposes me to be. He may be attracted—in a way, taking me for what I am. But, of course, he never forgets that I am not of

his class. What will he think when he finds out my real character? Won't the army spy (I dare say he'll call me that) seem to him lower by far than the bedizened concert-girl? Or—will he understand?"

"Say, Madge," suddenly called out a young fellow in khaki—a private from the fort barracks. "Give us a soldier song, won't you?"

Madge looked at Jim. He had suddenly shifted his position, but without turning toward her. A curious smile curled her lip. From the pile on the piano she picked out a piece of sheet music on which was a picture of a troop of charging cavalry, and handed it to Scroggs.

"All right," she called out to the soldier from the fort. "Here's a new one that might fill the bill. I brought it with me from the East. Go head, Scroggs!"

The pianist played a few martial chords. Then Madge, throwing her head back, flung herself into the song. Through the melody one could hear the blare of bugles, the clash of sabers, and the thunder of hoofbeats, all fitting in with the spirited words:

"TO THE COLORS"

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"It's 'Boots and saddles,' and marching kit!

For the chance has come to fight a bit!

And it's hark! Ra-ta-ta!

To the front! Ra-ta-ta!

For we've our marching orders!

Nobody knows just where we go,

And none of the lot cares half a blow!

For it's hark! Ra-ta-ta!

We're off! Ra-ta-ta!

For we've our marching orders!"

"It's listen and hark: 'To the Colors,' boys!

You must know the call in the battle's noise;

And it's hark! Ra-ta-ta!

We're off! Ra-ta-ta!

For we've our marching orders!

Honor and toil and death to find,

And dreams of the girls we've left behind!

But it's hark! Ra-ta-ta!

We're off! Ra-ta-ta!

And we've our marching orders!

"Stirrup to stirrup, and rein to rein,

Cantering far and fast;

What o' the hardship, what o' the pain?

It's Active Service at last!

If it's glory or woe,
Doesn't count for a blow,
When the game of war's to play;
For it's Marching Orders!
It's Marching Orders!
And, lads! We start to-day!"

There was no resisting the swing and *verve* of this call to battle. Words and music together would have awakened the fighting spirit in the veriest poltroon who ever hid behind a tree when bullets were flying.

Everybody in the room caught it up, and the air was roared in a dozen different keys. Then, as Scroggs finished it up with a dashing arpeggio, Madge stepped down from the platform and seated herself opposite Jim, with only the table between them.

He looked at her now, with blazing eyes.

"Did you sing that deliberately?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Why? Why? Why?"

He repeated the word feverishly, as he leaned toward her.

"I'll tell you—later," she replied, with a quiet intonation that maddened him.

"You'll tell me now—now! I feel as if I could break your neck for doing such a cruel thing."

"It *was* cruel. I know that. I meant it to be. I——"

She stopped and looked around. But in the din of the room they were as much alone, so far as the likelihood of being overheard was concerned, as if they had been in a wilderness.

"Go on," he said.

Madge drew a deep breath. Her arms were on the table, her eyes steady.

"How did that song—affect you?" she asked quietly.

"Affect me? How *should* it affect me?" he broke forth tempestuously. "It made me mad enough to kill myself—and you."

She smiled at this, and went on, in a grave, even voice:

"Did it bring it all back—Jim? Did it make you think of the old cavalry drill, the guidons flashing in the sun, the clashing of swords, the——"

"Madge! Don't——"

But she continued, steadily and relentlessly:

"Did it recall the days when you, too, dreamed of marching orders, of the call 'To the colors!' of active service? Did it?"

Into his face came the expression she had been waiting for—the hungry look of a man whose heart is seared and torn by a great longing. He did not speak. His hand moved toward the glass of whisky he had not touched before. She caught his wrist and held it.

"Don't drink that now. I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"Jim—*why don't you go back?*"

He shook his head. Her fingers were still clasping his wrist.

"I—can't," he answered, in a strange, hoarse tone, deep in his throat, as his eyes stared past her into space.

"Yes, you can! You can! You're a brave man, I know. You're not afraid to take your punishment, whatever it is. After all, you deserve it. You'll admit that. Go back and face them all, just as you would face the enemy with

your troop. It is the only manly thing to do. It is what, as a true soldier, you *must* do."

"Do you think so—Madge?"

There was a thoughtful, almost tender, modulation of his voice. It was as if he were asking the advice of one in whom he placed perfect trust.

"I'm sure of it," she answered. "You will regain your self-respect, and your—your—friends—will be so proud of your courage. Jim! Haven't you *wanted* to go back, all along?"

She had never released his wrist. He put his other hand over hers, and, as he looked into her eyes, she saw that while the anger had died out of them, another passion was there, even stronger than the wrath which had blazed up as he heard her song.

Madge was naturally a self-controlled young woman, but, try as she might, she could not prevent her heart beating violently now. It was not altogether an unpleasant agitation, either.

"Wanted to go back?" he echoed wildly. "Haven't I? Yes; every day and every hour

since I came away. And I would have gone back, I think—except for you.”

“Except for me? I don’t understand.”

But she *did* understand, and there was nothing very strange to her in his next words:

“Yes, Madge, except for you. Don’t you believe in what people call love at first sight?”

She nodded.

“I am glad you do,” he said. “Until to-day I’d seen you only once. But that was enough. If I hadn’t blundered in here last night with that fellow who kicked his horse, I should have been on my way back to the regiment by this time. I was willing to give myself up. I was tired of the lonely life, in hiding and disgraced, and I thought anything would be better. But you looked at me as no other woman ever did before, and I had to stay. I came in to-night to find out whether that look was strong enough to hold me. And it is. Things appear different to me now. I’m going to stay here—where you are.”

The peculiar thing about it all was that he did not ask what her feelings were, or whether she had any concerning him. It may have been that he thought his avowal was too unusual to

be taken quite seriously. Dan Reilly rudely interrupted their conversation by shouting from the bar:

"Madge! Let's have another spic!, won't you? About soldiers, like that last one."

"All right!" she answered, in her customary careless manner.

She got up from the table and went to the piano. But she did not sing another soldier song. Instead, she gave them several of the comic "hits" of the day—each with an easily remembered refrain, so that all could join in the chorus. With a sentimental ballad now and then, as a counterbalance.

At intervals she came down from her platform and mingled with the men and women at the tables. Several times she spoke to Jim on indifferent topics. But not once did she ask him why he meant to stay here—where she was.

Jim never finished that second glass of whisky. At midnight Madge went out to go home. He followed and caught her at the corner of the street.

"Madge! Won't you speak to me?" he pleaded.

"To-morrow night."

Then, as if afraid of further speech, either from herself or him, she walked swiftly away, leaving him standing there, looking after her.

CHAPTER X

SURRENDER

JIM! Jim Craig!" murmured Madge, as a little later she tossed about on her hot pillow. "What did Mrs. Billings say? Sooner or later a sweetheart is sure to come. A soldier and a cavalryman! The very best friend I could have—better than all the woman friends in creation! Well, all this may be. But what then? Hasn't such a man right to demand perfect truth from me? That is, if I admit that I care for him?"

How uncomfortable her pillow was! She must turn it over. It would be cooler underneath! Yes; that was much better. And——

"If I care for him! He asked me whether I believed in love at first sight. Love is a strong word. It means so much. But I—there's no one to hear me—I *do* love you, Jim! You poor, silly, brave boy! Where will this love of ours land us both? Not to dishonor,

surely! I couldn't believe that, Jim. So—I surrender!"

She wondered afterward how it was that she had fallen asleep so peacefully. But it was simple enough. The weight of an uncertainty had been lifted from her mind. She knew now that she *did* believe in love at first sight.

With her breakfast came a long telegram from Colonel Parsons. It told her that Lieutenant Marston would be there that evening to identify the man she believed to be James Craig. If the identification were made, Lieutenant Marston would take charge of the prisoner, relieving her of any further work on the case.

She read and re-read the message until she had every word by heart. Then, in a sudden fury, she crumpled the paper in her hand and flung it on the floor, as far away as she could.

"His prisoner!" she gritted through her teeth. "His prisoner!"

But this unreasoning fury did not last. She picked up the telegram and smoothed it out on the table to read it over once more. As she looked thoughtfully through the window at the

dancing waters of San Francisco Bay, she put the yellow paper to her lips.

Contradictory, of course! But, although Madge Summers was a level-headed detective—in high favor with the War Department, on account of her success in tracking deserters—she was, before that, a woman, whose sentimental nature was none the less active because never shown to her employers. What do the austere officials of the War Department know about sentiment, anyhow? Many a sensible girl has kissed the name of her lover in a telegram.

Madge did not leave her room all day. Her private correspondence—letters to friends in Washington, mostly—had fallen behind. So she spent the day in writing—when she was not brooding over the announcement that Lieutenant Marston was on his way to San Francisco and would be there that evening.

There was no way of stopping him. He had left Kansas when the colonel sent the message, and the train was due about eight o'clock. When she heard that it was at least three hours late, on account of a freight wreck in the

Sierras, she heaved a sigh of relief. Lieutenant Marston had the name of her hotel, the Waldemar, and was to come directly there. She told Mrs. Billings, and asked her to send him over to Reilly's. It was there he would have to make the identification, if he made it at all.

Jim was waiting for her, when—rouged, powdered, and painted, and in the pink costume that belonged to her singing-girl life—she burst gayly into Reilly's. There was more recklessness in her demeanor than usual. She felt as if nothing were of much consequence—except the coming of Lieutenant Marston.

The horror of it all! Already she could see him looking at the deserter in that cold way of his. There could be no escape. Of course, Marston would recognize him. The next thing would be the calling forward of soldiers from the fort—who would be detailed under his orders. Then the claspings of steel handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists, and then——

She had been thinking of this all day. Until the thing actually faced her, however, she would not let it unnerve her. Marston would

not be there for several hours. In the meantime, she would let Jim know what seemed of so much importance to him. She would tell him that she did believe in love at first sight. That was what he wanted to hear from her, and she would say it honestly. But—could she make him understand, before he found out what some might call her perfidy—that love was detached from duty? The distinction was subtle. Would he be able to see it?

It was characteristic of her straightforwardness that she never thought of hiding from Jim that she was responsible for his capture. He had won her as Madge, the concert hall singer; he must know her in the end as Madge Summers, the army detective.

She walked down the room to the piano, with a sly smile for everybody she passed. The smile was in her contract. She was paid for it as well as for singing. Reilly would have had her drink, too, but that was where she drew the line.

At Jim's table she stopped and deliberately smiled at him. But it was not the same kind of smile that she had bestowed upon the others.

It was neither sly nor suggestive of the wanton. In the deep gaze that accompanied it Jim read sadness, not mirth.

"Madge!" he whispered huskily.

"Yes?"

As she said "Yes," there was much more than a mere acknowledgment of her name. Of the thousand inflections possible to this commonest of words, "Yes," she had chosen the one that conveyed to him a distinct message. He caught at her dress eagerly.

"Madge!"

She smiled again, as one might placate a fretful child. Then, brushing her skirt with her hand, as if to remove any wrinkles he might have made when he took hold of it, she said softly:

"I'll come to you after a while."

He sank back in his chair contentedly. She had noticed that a glass of beer was before him, and that the tumbler was still full. He was not drinking whisky this night.

Scroggs showed her a song and she nodded. She did not care what it was. She held the sheet in her hand to read the words and followed the music as he played it. This was re-

versing the usual order, since the accompanist is supposed to follow the singer. But rules, artistic or otherwise, were held of little account at Reilly's. So long as there were noise, jollity, and a satisfactory sale of liquor, the proprietor cared little how the results were reached. As for his customers, they liked Madge "any old way," as Reddy, the strong-arm man, declared with several strong oaths.

When the song, and its loudly demanded encore, were over, and Madge had declined the usual invitations to drink, she sat down quietly at Jim's table. Over his haggard face there spread a light that sent a sharp pain to her heart. He not only loved, but trusted her. His welcoming look could not mean anything less.

"I'm glad to see you, Jim," she said.

"Glad—to—see me?" he repeated slowly. "Do you mean that you are glad just as you are to see any one else you know in this place? It is the sort of conventional thing people say to each other almost without knowing it. Do you mean more than that?"

For a few moments she did not reply. Then, as her glance wandered about the room:

"I think I do."

"You do?" he broke in eagerly. "Then tell me more. I did not keep anything from you last night. I told you that I intended to stay here, in San Francisco, because you are here. I asked if you believed in love at first sight. Whether you believe it or not makes no difference. I know there is such a thing. It is keeping me here. Madge! You said I must wait till to-night before you would speak. I love you, Madge! I'm not much, of course. A girl would have plenty of reason for saying that she could not bring herself to think of me—in that way. But, you are different. I want you, sweetheart! I want to go away with you, and I'll be a man again, for your sake. I will! I swear it! With you for a wife, I could——"

"Hush, Jim! That's enough!"

But she reached for his hand under the table, and he had his answer.

Great happiness affects men in various ways. Jim became boisterous. When she was on the platform again, his voice was loudest in the rollicking refrain, and he held the final note to the very limit of the piano accompaniment.

He was on his feet when Madge finished. But she waved him back with a tormenting lit-

tle laugh, and began another song. So he sat down again to watch her, with a luxurious sense of ownership that challenged her every time she met his sparkling gray eyes.

The last line had been reached, and the company was roaring and shrieking it out, according to custom, when Madge suddenly ceased singing. Up to that moment her voice had been heard above all the others. The chorus dropped painfully when no longer sustained by her full, rich tones.

Jim moved in his chair, as if to go to her. He felt that something must be the matter. As he saw a wave of pallor sweep across her cheeks under the rouge, he was sure of it. Her eyes were fixed on something down the room. He followed their direction, and an abrupt stoppage of his heart paled his own face.

Standing just inside the doorway, his back against the wicker half doors, was a tall, dark-visaged, well-dressed man, with a cigarette in his mouth. There was no mistaking his military carriage. When he strode toward the bar, his cavalry walk was too pronounced not to be recognized. A soldier, and a trooper, every inch of him.

"Marston!" muttered Jim. "What's *he* doing here?"

Lieutenant Marston leaned against the bar, and, as he ordered a glass of beer, coolly surveyed everybody in the long room with an impersonal stare. He met the gaze of Jim, held it for an instant, and passed on to Reddy and other "regulars" at Reilly's. Then he glanced at Scroggs, and so reached Madge. She was trembling, resting one hand upon the piano. Marston did not seem to know her. He turned his eyes away when he had looked her over to his satisfaction. Then he sipped his beer.

"If he's after me, I'm going to give him a chance to tell me so," decided Jim.

With a swagger so like Marston's that any one would say they had learned it at the same place, he walked up the room and also leaned against the bar. There was not more than six feet of space between the two men. They stood face to face and looked at each other. Neither betrayed the slightest recognition. For fully half a minute they remained thus. Then Jim leisurely turned away, walked to the door and went out.

As the wicker doors slammed behind Jim,



HE WAS NOT THE MAN

Marston drank the remainder of his beer and took another cigarette from his officer case. He was lighting it at the gas-jet on the bar when Madge touched him on the arm.

"Say, mister, won't you give me a cigarette?"

Her bold manner and tone fitted the rouged cheeks and spangled pink frock. Without a word, he handed her the silver box. Daintily she took out a cigarette. She shook the dust out of the end by striking the hand holding it on her other arm. Meanwhile she looked inquiringly at Marston.

The bartender, who had been standing close to them, inside the bar, moved away to serve a customer. Then she spoke, in a guarded tone:

"Lieutenant Marston?"

"Yes."

"I saw you in Colonel Parsons' office last week."

"Yes. I remember you, Miss—Miss——"

"Summers is my name," she interrupted.

"You were sent here by the colonel, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think I've got our man."

"Have you? Where is he?"

Lieutenant Marston's coolness was irritating, but Madge would not allow it to ruffle her. So she answered steadily:

"It was the tall man who just went out. I thought I saw you looking at him. He leaned against the bar just about where I am now."

"Oh, yes. I saw *him*."

"Well?"

"*He was not the man*," said Lieutenant Marston imperturbably.

"Not the man? Not Lieutenant James Craig?"

"No."

"He seemed to know you."

"I don't think so. I never saw him before."

He threw away the end of the cigarette he had been smoking, and lighted another.

"Are you quite sure, Lieutenant Marston, that I have made a mistake in picking out this man as a deserter?"

"If you think he is Craig, you are mistaken," he answered, in a tone of finality. "I am sorry for your sake, Miss Summers. Colonel Parsons told me, just before I left the post, that

you never had been known to slip up. But the best of us must expect failures now and then. There is a train for the East at twelve o'clock. I shall go back to-night. Too bad you have been deceived in this case. But you may land your man yet. I hope so. Any message for Colonel Parsons, Miss Summers?"

"Yes. If you will kindly tell the colonel that I will bring Lieutenant Craig to him within a month, I shall be much obliged to you."

"I will tell him, of course. Good night, Miss Summers."

He half extended his hand. Then, as she did not seem to see it, he raised it in military salute, turned on his heel, and marched out, with a double slam of the spring doors. As he disappeared, Madge dropped to the floor the cigarette she had taken from the silver box, and powdered it under her foot.

"Who was that guy, Madge?" asked Reilly. "Looked like a soldier."

"A man I met once in the East," she replied carelessly.

"I don't like his face."

No reply to this blunt remark seemed necessary, so Madge said nothing. She started the

merriment going again with more music. Until past twelve o'clock she sang and sang, as her contract demanded. Then, when she had given Reilly full measure of her time, and something over, she put on the long cloak that she wore out of doors, and, with a brief "Good night all!" went out.

She was not at all surprised when Jim joined her before she had walked a block toward her hotel.

CHAPTER XI

"GRAND ROUNDS"

I WANT to talk to you."

He jerked this out in an imperative tone. But she knew it was only the straining of his heart that hardened his voice. There was no resentment in her own accents as she returned:

"I knew you would. What do you want to say?"

"Well, I don't know just how to begin. And it is so late. Of course, you want to go home."

"I can give you half an hour. I am not afraid to walk about the city at night. Nobody will interfere with me while I am with you. I haven't forgotten what you did to Black Pete."

"Oh, *that* fellow!" he said scornfully. "But I can promise to take care of you for half an hour. I wish I might have it to do always."

She did not reply, but, as they walked away

in the direction of the water front, she asked:

"Why did you go out of Reilly's like that tonight? Was it because you recognized that officer standing at the bar? He *was* an officer, as any one could see. I thought you looked at him as if you had met before."

"Yes, he is an officer. I *had* met him before. I am—that is, I was—in his regiment."

"The regiment you deserted?" she asked quietly.

"Yes. I thought he'd come to take me. So I went up to him, and gave him every opportunity. But he wouldn't show that he knew me. I don't know why. It may have been because he did not want the trouble of having me arrested. Or perhaps he thought it would be rather a dirty business."

Madge's hand, which held Jim's left arm, trembled a little. Probably he did not notice it. He continued:

"When I had stood in front of him long enough I came out, because I wanted fresh air. I could not breathe well indoors, while he was in the place."

"And you waited for me?"

"Yes. Seeing that man made me think of

all I have lost—the old life, the regiment! And the hopelessness of it was too much for me."

"I know," she said softly. "But don't talk about it—now. Just walk."

Instead, he touched the fingers resting lightly on his coat sleeve, and turned so that he could look at her face in the light of an arc-lamp over their heads.

"Doesn't this mean that I have you?" he demanded earnestly. "I thought I had. That was why I felt as if I must see you now, late as it is. *You* won't turn your back on me, will you?"

Although she felt her face grow white under the rouge and powder—drabbed into patches after being on all the evening without renewal—she laughed carelessly. Then, with her broadest brogue, which she could assume at will, she returned:

"Sure now, ye ain't thinkin' I'd be leavin' a—pal, do ye?"

His face changed in the uncertain blue and violet light of the arc. His hand closed hard over the fingers on his sleeve, as he said brokenly:

"Madge, I don't want you as a—*pal*. You

know that. It is cruel of you to say it. I want you—want you——”

She tried to break away from him then. But he held her hand so tightly that the rings she wore hurt her. She did not heed the pain, however. The struggle in her bosom, that had been going on for three days and nights, made her oblivious of everything else. The battle was about to end. Which side would be victorious—her more than pity for this man, or her strict loyalty to the Service she had always loved?

“Don’t! Don’t!” she gasped, trying to drag away. “Let me go!”

“Yes, I will let you go! Heaven knows I wouldn’t offend you. But—Madge—you are everything in this world to me. You are all I would live for. I’ve told you before. Now, I believe—I think—I know—that you—you—I’m not wrong, am I? You *do* lo——”

Why is it that nine men out of ten hesitate to use the word “love,” even under the most violent stress of the glorious passion? But it is true. They never will employ it if another expression can be made to do. Any ordinary observer can testify to that.

"You ask if I love you?" she said, in so low a tone that he had to bend far down to hear her. "You say you love me, and you want me to say that I love you?"

There was no faltering on *her* part so far as uttering the word was concerned. True to her sex, she liked to speak it. Clear and strong it came forth. It was the one word that would express what they were discussing, and she saw no reason for cheating it of its right to be heard.

"Yes, Madge. That is what I want. Won't you tell me?"

"If I tell you that, you must answer a question I am going to put to you."

In an instant he had dropped her hand and thrown his arms around her. She resisted at first. Then she yielded—long enough to let him feel that it gave the assurance for which he had begged—and broke away.

Only to lean, breathless, against the portal of a great, dark warehouse—a place which would shriek with rude activity in the daylight, but was ghostly in its gloom and emptiness at this, the deadest hour of the night.

"I didn't frighten you, did I, Madge?" he asked penitently.

She smiled and shook her head at him in playful reproof.

"No, no! I suppose you felt it was your right. Even though I did not say exactly what you asked for. Let us go on. If a policeman should happen to come along, he might think we were planning to break into this building."

"So he might. We'll go anywhere you like. I don't care. I feel so light, I could walk across the top of the bay, I believe."

"You needn't do that. You might get splashed," she laughed.

But her laughter soon died away. As they left the narrow thoroughfare in which they had been talking and struck into the broad reaches of Market Street, she said, in a serious tone, looking straight before her:

"Jim, why don't you tell me your last name?"

"My last name?" he repeated. "Why, it's Craig. I thought you knew that, when I told you that Lieutenant Marston—the man who was in Reilly's to-night—was an officer in my

old regiment. I was a second lieutenant—until—until——"

"I see." She was quiet for some time. Suddenly: "It seems to me that you must have wished this Lieutenant Marston would tell you he'd come for you. If he had done so, you could have gone away with him. Then, in a few weeks how happy you would be, back in the old regiment, with your brother officers, and the men of your troop! What an uplift it would give you to feel that your honor was clean and untarnished again. For it would be, you know. The stain would be off as soon as you had gone through the punishment laid down by the Regulations, and——"

He looked at her so curiously that she stopped speaking.

"You know what the Regulations are, eh?" he said. "You must have studied military terms."

"I have. These are days of advanced and technical education for women. Among other things, a passing acquaintance with the methods of the army and navy is expected of us. As a matter of fact, my father was a soldier,

and I suppose that makes me particularly interested."

"I suppose so."

"Don't you think I am right in my opinion that your happiness, as well as your duty, tells you to go back?"

"Perhaps!" he returned absently, and kept silent.

The steady look she gave him could stir up passions he had been trying to keep down, for soon he began to talk again—in that subdued, even way which is the surest index of intense emotion.

"Girl, I *can't* go back—now!" he said. "You are holding me away."

"I don't want to do that. Oh, Jim! Anything but that!"

"Rot!" he interrupted roughly. "Girl, can't you see that remaining here with you is more to me than all the armies of the universe? When a man and a woman come from opposite ends of the earth, knowing nothing of each other, not even names, and when, after seeing each other only two or three times, in a place like Reilly's, they stand, after midnight, in a lonely street, face to face, soul to soul,

with not even a strip of the world between them—don't you realize what it means? Why, when I first saw you in there, singing, after we had exchanged only a few sentences, I became mad! It was all I could do not to rush up to the platform, crush you to my heart, and say, before them all: '*This is my Woman!*' "

"Don't, Jim, don't!"

"Why not? I'm not ashamed of it now. We have exchanged vows, you and I—if not in words, at least in effect. I may tell you how I've felt from the first. And when I do, you can see that no army can claim me, not even if it were to make me a major-general."

It was useless to try to stem the torrent of his self-revelation. She could only let him keep on till he had finished—not all that was in his mind, but as much as he could put into speech at the time. They did not talk any more about the army. Instead, he told her that he would get employment in San Francisco, and, as soon as he was settled, they would be married. He had enough income from property in the East to keep himself, he said. But it would not do when he had *her*. She must live better than would be possible on what he

had. No shabby genteel poverty for *his* wife.

"But I have a little money," she told him.

He waved that away.

"Have you? So much the better. It will buy you things you may want that you don't care to ask me for. But—what about Reilly's? You won't keep on singing there? I couldn't stand that."

"To-morrow will be my last night. Reilly knows. It will end my week."

"And after that——"

"After that—I have some work to do at home. But, Jim, how is it you can care for such a girl as I am? A singer in a low saloon, for Reilly's *is* low. It has the reputation of being the toughest dive on the Barbary Coast, and I guess it deserves the name. You have seen me there, and you have heard me sing all kinds of songs. Some of them you would not hear in a——"

"Sunday-school?" he interrupted smiling.
"Well, no—hardly. But that is nothing to me. I know you sang them only because it was part of your regular work. Anyhow, what has that to do with the case? If you have done

things you don't care to talk about—why, so have I."

"But," she hesitated, "there may be something else, besides the songs at Reilly's."

"You couldn't tell me anything that would change my love for you a hair's breadth," he declared, with the impetuosity she liked so much. "If there's been something in your life—some mistake, I don't want to know. I'll never question you. We start square from tonight, and what we've been or done needn't count."

"Oh, but it does count," she insisted. "It counts for good or for evil. You're wrong about one thing you're thinking, though. There never was any one else. No one but you—no one but you, dear."

How it thrilled him when she used that last tender word! It fell from her lips seemingly without set intention, the natural expression of the love that she did not try to conceal.

"I didn't suppose there was anything—of that kind," he assured her. "In fact, I was thinking rather of my own miserable mistakes——"

"Let them pass, Jim. There is nothing

gained by brooding over errors. Let the dead past bury its dead. Here is where I live."

She had stopped in front of her hotel. The building, although not very large, was unmistakably aristocratic. Jim looked thoughtfully at the impressive portico and the ornamental windows and doors.

"You live here? At the Waldemar?"

"Yes. It is a nice, quiet hotel. I shouldn't care to stay at any other kind."

She knew what was in his mind, even before he ventured hesitatingly:

"It is rather expensive, I should say." Then, as he recalled what she had told him: "But you have an income of your own. You do not depend altogether on your singing?"

"Not altogether. Mr. Reilly does not pay large salaries."

There was a pause. Both seemed to be embarrassed. He, because he could not crush back instantly an ugly suspicion, and she, because she felt it was there. But it was only for a moment. She met his eye fearlessly, and he seemed to hear her saying—as she had said just before, in that truthful voice of hers: "There never was any one else."

It was enough. The evil thought conjured up by his own remark, "You do not depend altogether on your singing," melted away. He hated himself for giving it lodgement, even for an instant.

"Will you come and see me to-morrow afternoon?" she asked abruptly.

It was what he had been hoping for, yet without wholly expecting it.

"Who—who—shall I ask for? Have you forgotten that I've never heard your full name?"

"Tell the clerk you want to see Miss Summers. He will have you shown up to my sitting-room."

"What time may I come?"

"Four o'clock to-morrow—no, *this* afternoon. It is one o'clock now."

She went in at the side entrance. Jim Craig walked about the streets till nearly three before finally he made up his mind to go to his little hall room, a mile away from her hotel. It was the first time, since his coming to San Francisco, that he had entered it in anything approaching good spirits.

CHAPTER XII

"ON GUARD!"

WHEN Jim Craig presented himself at four o'clock in the office of the Hotel Waldemar he had changed his appearance to such a degree that people accustomed to seeing him at Reilly's and in kindred environment hardly would have recognized him. It was not only that he had been to a tailor and had his clothing pressed, nor that he had been careful to see that his linen was immaculate, and that every other detail of his dress was in perfect condition. All this he had done as a matter of course.

The most noticeable difference was in his attitude and bearing. Gone was the slouch with which he had moved about the streets. It had given way to a firm, soldierly tread—the swagger of the cavalryman that had attracted Madge's attention the first night she

saw him at Reilly's. His head was well up, and when he told the clerk to announce him to Miss Summers, the sonorous roll in his voice reminded one of orders given out of doors.

Above all, there was that in his face which spoke of some happiness already attained, with much more on the horizon.

She had prepared the clerk for his coming, and there was no delay in the call for "Front!" followed by "Show the gentleman to Number Four Hundred and One."

Jim Craig blinked uncertainly when the door of Number Four Hundred and One was opened. A quiet, well-bred young lady, dressed in perfect taste, stepped forward to greet him. Only that he knew the smile of Madge so well, he might not have believed at once that this really was the girl he had clasped in his arms in the dark street a little more than twelve hours before. He had associated her so entirely with the rouge and powder, the short, spangled pink frock, the vulgar imitation jewelry and the brazen demeanor of the singing girl at Reilly's, that he had not looked for this.

Not that he had expected her to be still rouged and painted, and he knew that she did

not wear the short-skirted pink dress in the daytime. Nevertheless, the Miss Summers of this afternoon was so entirely the opposite of Madge of Reilly's that it was hard to reconcile the two. He had not done it when he found her hand in his, as she led him to a chair by the window and sat by his side.

"Madge!" he blurted out, at last. "I didn't know how beautiful you were till this moment."

"Ridiculous!" she laughed. "Why, I have nothing on to make me even ordinarily attractive. No powder, no rouge, no jewelry, and in this plain gray gown I'm afraid you are not much of a judge of a woman's looks, Jim."

"I don't *judge* yours, dear. I only admire."

How big and handsome he was, as he leaned forward in his chair, with that stiff grace natural to the well-set-up trooper! He might have been in the saddle, in that attitude. The fact that he never forgot what it was to sit horseback showed in every involuntary movement.

"There's no use arguing about it," thought Madge. "The army must not lose such a splendid soldier. He's got to go back!" Then, aloud: "It's dangerous to admire any woman too much, Jim."

"Dangerous? Why, who is it likely to hurt? Her—or him?"

"Both."

She said this musingly, without looking at him. Her gaze was on her favorite view from the window—the restless, flirting, sunlit waters that roll in and out of the Golden Gate.

It was with a tender smile that he replied:

"That may be true in a general way, Madge. But it cannot apply to you and me. If I had not let my admiration and longing sweep me away, I don't think I should have had the nerve to wait for you last night. Danger? I should like to know what danger can come from a man worshipping the woman he is going to marry."

"Jim! Don't!"

She shrank from him as if the danger she had hinted at were already there. He raised his eyes in surprise. But only for a second. A good-looking young man of the world, and an army officer at that, cannot be innocent of feminine caprices. Seeing them repeated in one girl after another, he gets to know them as well as he does the "tactics" drummed into him at West Point.

"Why don't?" he asked softly. "We are to be married. Surely a man may be permitted to contemplate his happiness in advance. Now, what is the danger you insist on?"

But she could not tell him—yet. Marston's refusal to identify him meant nothing more to her than that officer had his own personal reasons for lying. What those reasons were Madge did not know, but she was sure they existed even when she had seen him in Colonel Parsons' room. It had struck her then that he would like to spoil her work if he could. He had given up the photograph of Lieutenant Craig grudgingly, and only at the direct request of Colonel Parsons—from whom it was tantamount to a command.

Coming to San Francisco under orders, he had had an opportunity to study the features of the deserter at close range—and had deliberately declared he was not the man. Yet Jim had confessed to her that he was. What was she to do?

"Jim, dear?" she said, with a sudden earnestness. "Say you love me, won't you?"

His answer was to look swiftly about the room—a natural, but unnecessary, precaution

—and clasp her tightly in his arms. She submitted, for his embrace was very sweet to her. Then she broke away gently.

"No, I want you to say in words, plainly, that you love me."

"I do say it, Madge. I'll say it a thousand times if you think you won't be tired of hearing it. I love you, Madge. I love you."

"Yes. That is what I wanted. You *love* me!"

"Love you and trust you—more than I trust myself."

Again that shrinking away that he could not understand.

"No, no! Not that, Jim! You must not say that!"

"I *must* say it!" he insisted. "I trust you with my heart. I am willing to trust you with my—life."

"No, no!" she repeated, and her breath came short, as if something were holding her heart to prevent it beating. "No, no, I tell you!"

He took her in his arms again, in spite of her struggles. With his face very near to hers, he whispered:

"Dear, I'm afraid I must kick out of line

ere, even if I'm court-martialed for disobeying orders. You'll have to let me go on trusting. You're all I have, you know."

"But—I've admitted that there are secrets in my life. Not the kind you seemed to fear last night. There never was another man. But this is a strange world, dear. A woman may have done things that she hides from her lover which have nothing to do with what he may most fear."

"I don't care——"

"Suppose I were a thief?"

"Impossible!"

"Yes, I think that would be impossible. It is not that. But if I were a murderer?"

He dropped his arms from her and fell back as if she had struck him in the face.

"A murderer?" he gasped.

She laughed at his sudden look of horror.

"I am not that, I assure you. I never killed anybody in my life, and I don't think I ever could—not intentionally, at least. You needn't turn away."

His broad back was toward her, as he stared out of the window. He seemed to be inter-

ested in watching a ferry-boat churning its way across the bay from Oakland.

"Jim!"

He swung around swiftly. She was horrified. In the few moments his face had been hidden from her it seemed to have taken on the lines and gray pallor of an old man—one who had known more than the common share of suffering. His lips twitched. He put up his hand, trying to still them.

"What is it, dear?" she almost screamed. "Are you ill?"

"No—not exactly. I—I—haven't been living right since I came to San Francisco. I have been turning night into day and drinking too much. Nature will take its toll, you know. I have stopped all such foolishness now, but I shall have to pay for what I've done. Remorse won't save me. It is the same about—about—other things we may have done. Punishment must come, sooner or later. I suppose I was a little faint. But I'm all right now."

Indeed, his natural color was returning, and he smiled like his usual self as he took her hand.

"It is true, Jim," she said slowly. "Punishment *must* come sooner or later. Especially

when there is deceit. But let us talk about something else. You love me, and that is the principal thing, after all."

"Yes, love and trust you," he responded, drawing her to him.

She did not take issue with him again on the word "trust." If he insisted on it, why should she be obstinate? At all events, she decided, with a touch of weariness, time would convince him one way or the other.

They talked of other things for more than an hour. Lovers who have just come to an understanding never want for topics. It was nearly half-past five when she said, as she looked at her silver traveling clock on the mantel:

"My gracious, Jim! Look at the time! You must go now, dear. I have to dress for my last night at Reilly's, and—and——"

"And you must have your dinner. Won't you dine with me? There's a good restaurant in this hotel, I know. Isn't that where you generally have your meals?"

"No. Always here in my room—very often with Mrs. Billings, the housekeeper. I don't care to go down to the public dining-room. I'll

tell you what. You shall have dinner here with me—on one condition."

"Name your terms," he laughed. "They'll have to be mighty hard to make me decline."

"They are not hard at all. Only that you'll promise to go as soon as we've finished dinner. And we must not be long over it, either."

"Very well, dear. I'll do it. But—*must* you go to Reilly's to-night? To have all those wretches making free with you, and you singing for their amusement? How I do hate the thought of it!"

"Not more than I do. But this is the last night. And you can be there, to see that—that—I don't elope with 'Reddy' or Scroggs!"

"Don't laugh, dear," he pleaded. "It is all so awful to me. I won't be there until it is time for you to come home. You'll find me outside the door, waiting."

So it was settled. Madge's own particular waiter brought up their dinner, in response to her telephoned order. They enjoyed it sitting by the window, where they could watch the red sun going down in the waters of the far-away Pacific. He kissed her when he left. She noticed that his lips were burning hot.

Madge appeared at Reilly's as usual—pink frock, rouge, imitation jewelry and all—and sang as gaily as ever. It was the generally expressed opinion that she never had put more "deviltry" into her work, and Scroggs asked her quietly whether some one had just left her a million. When Reilly paid her, she gave the money to Scroggs. With tears in his eyes, Scroggs hoped somebody really had left her a fortune.

Reilly did not let her go without protest. He offered her twice the salary he had been paying if she would stay only another week. He well knew she would draw enough extra patronage to make it a good investment. But Madge said she had other business that she must attend to before going back East. She could not sing any more this time.

"Very well," was Reilly's resigned response, when he found her mind was made up. "When you come to town again, you will give me a week or two, won't you?"

"Maybe," she replied.

After saying good-by to Scroggs, she went out of Reilly's forever.

CHAPTER XIII

KEEPING STEP

IT was settled between them that they would be married when Jim had got fairly down to work in the office of the importing house of Morgan, Jones & Co., where he had been promised employment. Evan Morgan, the head of the firm, had been a friend of Jim's father many years before. He was glad to do what he could for the son. So a vacancy was found, and Jim went to work in less than a week after Madge had sung for the last time at Reilly's.

Mr. Morgan was a prosaic man of business. He had no particular sentiment about the army. Not but that he approved it. The army was a good thing—a necessary institution, of course. It gave him a comfortable, patriotic feeling when he remembered that, as a taxpayer, he helped to keep it up. But it did not interest him when Jim Craig told him he had

been a soldier. He did not even take the trouble to inquire whether he had been a private or an officer. What did it matter? Jim soon proved himself to be a good clerk, and that was all he cared about.

Jim saw Madge nearly every evening. The attachés of the hotel got to know him, and took a friendly interest in the romance growing under their noses. Now that Madge had given up the pink frock and rouge, she did not mind being seen about the house. Only Mrs. Billings had the secret of her occupation and the strange places into which it sometimes led her. If the sleek, conservative clerk behind the counter in the hotel office had been told she used to sing at Reilly's, he would have called his informant a liar.

Madge and Jim often dined together in the hotel restaurant. Sometimes they went into the public parlor, where Jim, at the piano, rattled off music that he had been used to play for his brother officers—in those careless days when he had no idea he ever would become a deserter.

On Saturday afternoons and Sundays they took long walks in the park. Occasionally

they went there on other evenings. They did not meet except at those times. Jim was at his desk in the importing house for many hours every day.

For a month this went on. Jim had little time to brood over the crime that had ended his army life, and he was happy in the hope that he would soon be married. He had made up his mind about the kind of house he meant to live in with Madge. He described it to her in detail one evening, as they strolled through the park under the arching elms.

"You know, dear," he said, "we are going to have a little white cottage, with a big open fireplace, trees outside, and roses growing at all the windows—peeking in to see how happy we are."

"It will have to be in the country, then," she reminded him. "You don't find white cottages and climbing roses in the city—not even in California. Ah, how I wish it could be true!"

"It will be true," he assured her. "And very soon, too."

"How soon?" she asked timidly.

"What do you say to next month? I'm making good with Morgan, Jones & Co., and

I get a raise of salary next week—a big one. That's what I had to tell you this evening. You may have observed that there was something important on my chest. Now I've got it off."

It pleased him to see that she smiled in sympathy with his playful tone. But there was perplexity—even terror—in her eyes, as, in silence, she gazed down the long vista of trees. She did not speak for a long time. But he did not mind that, for her slim, white fingers were on his arm, and the bottom of her skirt brushed his shoe as they walked. When she was close to him conversation did not matter. You see, Jim Craig was a conventional lover in the main.

"Jim, I think I shall have to go home to the hotel," she said at last. "I'm not very well."

Instantly he was all anxiety.

"Not well? What is it—headache? You are not seriously ill, are you? Let us go to a drug store and get something. It's been hot to-day. You don't look as well as usual. I can see it now."

She was obliged to wait till he paused in his rush of questions, comments and sugges-

tions. Then, as he bent down to look into her face, she reassured him with:

"It is only a headache, dear. I suppose it is from the heat. I'll go home and lie down. That will cure me. It always does."

"But you can't be in your room alone. You ought to have somebody to take care of you."

"Mrs. Billings will come in. She is always very kind."

"Mrs. Billings! H'm!" he sniffed jealously. "Well, another month, and you'll find that I can be a good nurse, too."

"I'm sure of it, dear."

"I'll prove it to you. Well, no. I don't want to do that, either, because I couldn't unless you were sick. I'd rather have you take my word as to my nursing abilities. But it will have to be next month. Don't forget that, dear."

There was a sudden check to his volubility when Madge said quietly and distinctly:

"Jim, that would be impossible."

"What?"

"Next month," she replied.

"But——"

"It cannot be next month, nor the month after. Perhaps it never may be. Oh, my

dear, believe me when I tell you that I love you. But we cannot order everything as we please."

"We can order that, Madge," he insisted. "Consider! No one can interfere. You are turned twenty-one, and your own mistress. Very well, then. That must settle it. As for me, I am not worthy of you, of course. I know that. But—you believe in me, and—and—I think you love me. It sounds like a caddish thing for a man to say. But I am only repeating your own word."

"Yes, dear—my own word!"

"Then, with all that clear, what is to prevent our going to a minister in a month—as soon as I can find and furnish that white cottage? I can't fancy any objection. And I don't believe you can. That is, one that will hold water."

A low sob was her only response. She held his arm a little tighter and quickened her pace. It seemed as if she were in a hurry to get home. He supposed her head ached badly and that she was anxious to lie down. So he hurried when she did, and soon they were at the hotel, at the side entrance she had always used

when going to and from Reilly's. As he took her two hands in his, in farewell, he whispered:

"Good night! To-morrow will be Saturday. I will come at one o'clock, and we can have luncheon together. Then we will go for a boat ride. The bay is beautiful in this weather. We shall have a jolly afternoon, come back to the hotel for dinner and go to a theatre afterward."

But she shook her head—sadly, it seemed to him—as she returned:

"No, dear. Don't come until the evening. I want to rest till then. Besides, I have some work to do, and I can't spare time for you in the afternoon."

She winced as his face showed how disappointed he was. Their Saturday afternoons had been so happy. He looked forward to them as the holiday-time of each week. But he knew it was not her way to do things without sound reason. So he merely said:

"I am very sorry I cannot come in the afternoon, Madge. But, if it will be better for your head, I should be a brute to complain. As for the work, I suppose it must be done.

Ladies always have a bunch of needlework on their hands, and it's best to do it by daylight. Anyhow, the evening will be mine, won't it?"

"Yes, Jim, the evening will be yours."

With the sad smile he had noticed before, she went into the hotel. Jim waited till the colored porter had closed the door. Then he went away, to idle along the waterfront until bedtime. He was not much worried about Madge's headache, because really it did not seem severe. But, oh, how many weary hours before he would see her the next evening!

Of late Madge had been using the elevator to go to and from her rooms in the hotel. On this night she went up the stairs. Something impelled her to do things as she had done them in the week that she first met Jim Craig. The exertion of climbing four flights seemed to be good for her nerves. When she reached her sitting-room and closed the door she found she could think more clearly.

The room was dark, but she felt her way to the desk that was part of the hotel furniture, and took out an envelope that she knew just where to find. Then she sat down at the window, the envelope in her hand. The

waters of the bay glistened in the moonlight. She liked to look at them. It was one of her odd fancies that, in their restless way, they told her what to do. After a while she got up, and, lowering the window-shade, switched on the electric lights.

"I wish it *were* only a headache," she murmured.

The light showed that the envelope was yellow. She took from it a folded paper of the same tint. It was a telegram. She spread it out on the table—just as she had that other one which announced the coming of Lieutenant Marston. The message was worded differently. It read:

"Lieutenant Collins, with four privates, have been sent from post. They will come to your rooms in hotel at nine o'clock, according to your instructions, and will bring Craig back, a prisoner. Headquarters requests that you come with them. Parsons."

"Nine o'clock to-morrow night!" she groaned. "How soon it will be here! And then—— Oh, Jim! Will you see that I am doing this for you? Will you understand that I love you more than you do yourself, and

that because I do, I must save your honor? Can you look behind the deed and see the motive prompting it? My love! My love!"

It was a mercy that the tears came. She leaned her head on her arms and sobbed for so long that at last she actually had the headache which had been her excuse for leaving him. Still, the weeping was a comfort to her. Afterward, when she had bathed her face in cold water, she sat again by the open window in the dark.

The moon was sinking, and only one shaft of silver lay across the bay. But the waters danced as merrily as ever in that narrow path, and Madge felt their encouragement until the moon disappeared. Then she pulled down the window-shade and once more lighted up the room.

By the side of the telegram, spread out on the table, she put the photograph of Jim Craig. She looked from one to the other and back again for an hour. Anybody who did not know why she did it might have thought it mere idleness. But, below her breath, she murmured in agony:

"Oh, Jim, dear, how heartless it seems!

And yet, my love! It is for you—only for you!"

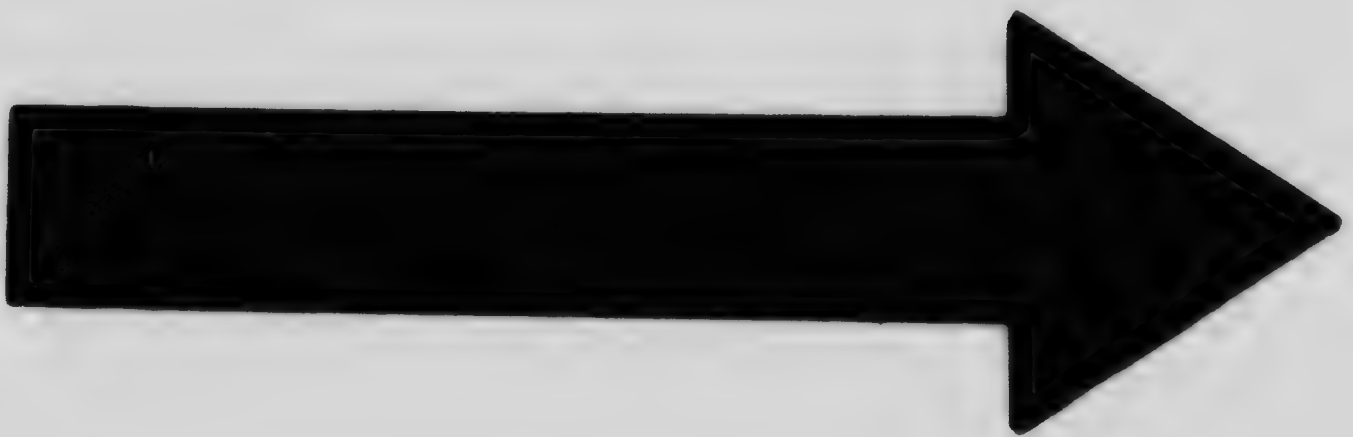
In the morning she wondered how it was that she had been able to sleep so soundly, without a dream to disturb her. Yet it was reasonable enough. The deepest sleep is that which comes from utter exhaustion.

When she had told Jim she had work to do that day, he had assumed it was to be done with needle and thread. She had not corrected him. It was better that he should think that—for the present. What she did was to go to another hotel, a mile away from her own, and ask for Lieutenant Collins. She wanted to make sure he and his men would be at her rooms at nine that evening.

"It gives me great pleasure to see you again, Miss Summers!" said the gallant lieutenant, when they met in the hotel parlor. "We all said, when you left our place in Kansas, that you would run down your man. I congratulate you on your splendid work."

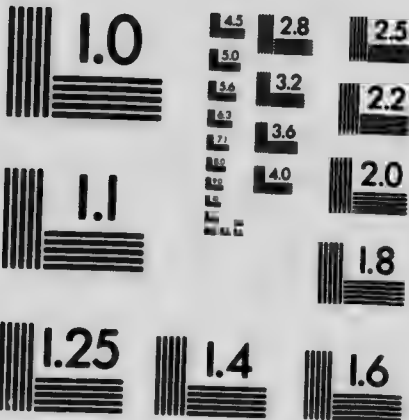
"Thank you," she answered, without enthusiasm.

"Lieutenant Marston was disappointed—on your account, when he found you had the



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wrong man under surveillance at that time. When he heard you had got him now beyond question, he could hardly believe it. But he was very pleased over your success, of course."

"Was he?"

The dryness with which Madge uttered these two words made Lieutenant Collins almost uncomfortable. He was inclined to be bashful—as much so as an army officer could be—and he hoped he had not said anything stupid. The conversation lasted ten or fifteen minutes. Before it ended the lieutenant understood exactly what he was to do. Then he felt that he ought to make some comment on the affair before Madge departed.

"Poor Craig! I feel very sorry for him," he said. "It seems too bad that I am sent to take him back, for I have command of the troop that was his! It makes me feel—by Jove!—as if I were a traitor, somehow. Of course I am only obeying orders, and I haven't anything to do with actually catching him, you know. But still—by gad!—I wish I hadn't got to do it. Awfully good fellow, Craig! We all thought so much of him. Plays the piano—er—and—er—true to the core."

He paused for breath. Then, as Madge said nothing, he continued helplessly:

"Best friend a fellow could have, by gosh! Now he's to go back to his regiment under guard, like a felon. Say, Miss Summers, it seems a pity, doesn't it? Kind of taking him at a disadvantage—sort of hitting him behind, without giving him a chance to fight back. I—er——" She was putting out her hand. "Oh! *Good* afternoon, Miss Summers. *Very* pleased to meet you again. I'll be there, with my men, at nine o'clock. Orders are orders! Good afternoon! Awfully pleased to——"

And so forth. The well-meaning, but rather blundering, young officer drove on until Madge was clear of the hotel and had stopped a street car. As she got aboard she saw that he was standing in the gutter, hat in hand, grinning vacuously and in imminent danger of being run over by a recklessly driven express wagon.

"Poor fellow!" thought Madge. "He's about as awkward a man—for a gentleman—as I ever met. Yet I've no doubt he would fight like a fiend on a battie-field. That's the way with all our boys. God bless 'em!"

CHAPTER XIV

A MASKED BATTERY

WHEN Jim Craig entered her sitting-room that evening it was with the light step and smile with which he always greeted her. He did not smile much when alone, for the great weight was on his heart at all times. But always it lifted for the moment in which he first looked upon Madge after a day's absence.

She, on her part, gave no sign of the purpose that filled her, and in which she had strengthened herself by steady contemplation of her duty. Whether love would have outweighed her devotion to the service if she had not felt that Jim Craig's return to his regiment would be his salvation, was a question. She did not attempt to answer it. Fortunately, as she believed, fate had saved her that embarrassment.

She knew—and so would he know, eventually—that she could not have done otherwise, for the sake of his honor and her own. Meanwhile, until the instant arrived when she must give the signal that would make him a prisoner, he was her boy—her love! She yielded to his passionate embrace and kiss without misgiving.

There was nothing false in her thus giving way. She loved him, and he loved her. They would be married—when he had been to Kansas and purged himself of his foolishness. Because she chanced to be the agent in causing him to undergo the ordeal, it was not forbidden her to permit a demonstration of the holy fire burning in both their hearts.

"Are you better, dear?" were his first words.

"Much better," she answered. "I seemed to need a good night's rest. That was all."

He looked around the room for evidences of the sewing that might have occupied her.

"And the work you had to do? Were you well enough for that?"

"Yes."

"I don't see any of it about."

She laughed, and he did not notice that she was somewhat constrained.

"You will see it, perhaps, after a while. But never mind that. Have you felt well all day?"

"Not so very. I never do when I am kept away from you. I didn't sleep soundly last night, either. That is not unusual, however. When a man has tormenting recollections always in the background, they have a way of breaking through present happiness and giving him troubled dreams.

"You should not go to bed while you are in that state of mind," she told him gently. "Doctors and scientists generally insist that one should fall asleep only with pleasant thoughts."

"I know. But if I were to wait for them when I'm in such a mood as came over me last night, after I'd left you, I shouldn't sleep at all. Ah, well! I'm with you now. Dreams can't worry me here."

"I don't know about that. Yet I would drive away all sad memories from you if it could be done."

They were seated side by side on a pretty

chintz-covered sofa which was a favorite lounge of hers. One of her arms was around him. He clasped the other hand in both of his own.

"It *can* be done, Madge," he declared passionately. "When I am with you it seems as if nothing evil could breathe the same atmosphere. Those dear, clear eyes of yours would vanquish Apollyon himself."

"Silly boy!" She pulled his head down to her shoulder and held it there, with a hand on his temple. "If I am a good pal, that is all I can hope to be. They said over at Reilly's that I was 'white.' It is true they were speaking of Madge, the singer. But I hope it applies with equal force to Madge Summers, of the Hotel Waldemar."

"Yes, when the kind of folks you meet at Reilly's say one is 'white' they have gone as far as they can in the way of praise. You have reason to be proud of it, dear, and I am proud, too, for your sake. Imagine how you would feel if you were what I am—what you suspected the very first time you saw me—a deserter."

"Hush, Jim! I don't like to hear you talk

like that. It was not your fault. You had begun on the biggest, most splendid work in the world—carrying arms for your country. Then something evil touched you on the shoulder, and you dropped aside. That was all. Don't you see? You fell out of line. But it isn't for always. You are still keeping step. As for your being a deserter, why, I'm one, too."

"You?"

He tried to sit up, to look into her face, but she held him to her shoulder, as she went on:

"Yes. I, like you, had fine, clean work to do. I was doing it to the best of my ability, and there was not a flaw in my loyalty. Then I was tempted. I don't believe I even tried really to resist. I was ready to run away. My work—the duty that had been my very life—would have prevented our friendship, Jim!"

Again he would have looked at her, but she restrained him as before, and continued steadily:

"We are both deserters, dear. Let us hope that we may both take our punishment and still be pals."

She could not hold him longer. He insisted on gazing straight into her eyes.

"Pals?"

"Yes. Jim—in the best way."

"But I don't want you as a pal," he protested. "I don't care for that word between us. I've told you that before. You'll be my wife."

"Well," she said, trying, but without much success, to smile naturally. "May not a wife be a pal?"

"Of course, but I want you for a wife first. We'll talk then about being pals. Do you know, dear," he continued, with animation, "you look so entirely different from the Madge I met at Reilly's that I never get over wondering."

"Perhaps you like me better with rouge on my face and a lot of cheap jewelry in my hair. Do you?"

"Every way I see you I like you better. But wasn't it strange that we found each other—each other out of all the world—in such a place as Reilly's? Why, it's a wonderful romance."

"And like all real romances, it must end

happily," she murmured. "It must—it must!"

It was he that made her a prisoner now. His strong arm was around her, and it gave her strength and courage to say what she knew she must put into words before—before—nine o'clock. Slowly, falteringly, she began:

"Jim, there's something I have to tell you, and I don't know how to do it. I—don't—know how—to do it."

"What is it, dear? Tell me, in any way you like."

There was no misgiving in his voice. After the assurances she had given him as to her past life, what could she say that would disturb him? He knew girls often attached importance to disclosures which a man might regard as utterly trivial. He smiled as he waited.

"I wonder," she went on musingly, "just how much your love would bear."

"I don't wonder. I know my love is invincible. But I *am* wondering if you would be happier knowing *my* secret. No, I'm afraid not. It would only make you miserable, and I am not selfish enough for that. Yet I wish I could tell you. It would be so good to lay bare my

whole life to the one person on earth whom I know I can trust."

"Jim, dear!" she cried, with an agony that made him start. "You must not be always saying that you trust me. Your experience in the world surely has taught you that there is no human being in whom you can have absolute, implicit faith."

"Nonsense, Madge! I have had no experience that tells me anything of the kind. And if I had, what then? You are not like anybody else I ever knew. So how could I measure you by any standard except your own, even if I cared to do it at all?"

"But, Jim! Listen! I have *lied* to you!"

He gave her a quizzical smile.

"You have!" he said lightly. "Oh, you wicked little fibber! I'll bet the lie was a white one."

"Ah! I wish it were! It is black, Jim. So black that you may never forgive it!"

"Rubbish! I don't know what you're talking about."

He would not take her seriously. She continued hurriedly:

'You don't know what I'm talking about?

No, of course you don't. I've deceived men before, and not minded it much. But you, Jim! I——"

"I thought we'd done with all that, dear," he interrupted gently. "We shall have to get something for your nerves. You seem to be all in a flutter to-night."

"In a flutter!" she echoed. "Why, Jim, I'm mad—mad with panic, and uncertainty, and fear, and trouble over what I've done! And yet it's been all for you—all for you, Jim! Oh, if only you'll believe it!"

His eyebrows came together the merest trifle.

"Believe it? Have I ever doubted anything you ever told me?"

"No, no! That's true, dear. You never have doubted me. And you'll believe me now! I'm sure you will! You must!"

She got up from the sofa and walked across the room, while he watched her with a world of sorrowful tenderness in his eyes. When she came back he took her in his arms.

"Jim! I told me close—close!" she whispered.

"Indeed I will, forever," and his clasp tightened.

She went on, in the same eager whisper, her words tumbling over each other:

"Jim, talk to me. Tell me that you love me—that you will always love me, whatever happens! Because when you know that——"

"Madge," he answered, and there was a resolute swing to his words that encouraged her, "you're everything that stands for love and happiness—for life itself. Without you I shouldn't have the pluck to go on playing the game. But, with you, we'll make it the biggest, bravest game that ever was played. And we'll win out, dear—we'll win out! Then for that white cottage, with the roses, that I've set my heart on!"

"If that could come true, dear, I—— Jim, if ever you are puzzled by anything I've done, or feel inclined to hate me for it, look for the key to the riddle in this—I love you."

"I'm glad there is a key," he said, and he was more grave than he had been at any time that evening. "There couldn't be a better one than that."

"And it is the true one," she said. "I shall never do anything in all my life that won't be done for love of you."

Her hand was on his shoulder. She raised it to his head and smoothed his hair thoughtfully for a few moments in silence. Then, drawing a deep breath, as if for a task that would take all her strength, she continued:

"Jim, I told you a little while ago of a big duty I had to perform—a work that I feared might interfere with my friendship for you. One long night I stood at that window and fought it all out, while the lights glared and glittered all over the town. I felt fairly sure of myself, but as the darkness came I began to see the sterner lines of life. Soon the moon came up and made a light pathway for herself across the bay. I knew it was telling me I must march straight, without turning to one side or the other. So I gave the moon a good soldierly look and saluted, and she seemed to say: 'Eyes front and look out for your formation.' I stood at 'Attention!' until, after a long time, it grew dark again, and I was alone with an ache in my heart. But I had found what it all meant. I'd been thinking of you through the night, and I knew I cared more for your military career than my own happiness. Then the sun came up,

and—— 'Wasn't it strange? The world looked quite new."

"Well, you'll keep no more vigils alone, dear. So don't worry. I know you don't mind my smoking in your room. You've told me so many times."

So cool was he, and so little weight did he attach to all she had said that he took out a cigar, and fumbled in his pocket for his match-box. She caught his wrist wildly.

"Jim! Jim! You will *not* understand! Can't you see that I'm nearly out of my mind? Jim! My love! . . . *I am an army detective, and I was sent here by Headquarters at Washington to track you down!*"

He crushed the cigar in his hand, and raised his clenched fist as if he would strike her.

CHAPTER XV

IN OPEN ORDER

SHE did not move. If he had actually beaten her, she would not have tried to avoid him.

There was a long pause, during which he never took his eyes from her face. He was trying to grasp the full meaning of her confession. She had spoken plainly enough, but there are some things that a man cannot credit at first, even though he feels them to be true. At last he understood. From his dry throat came a short laugh. When he spoke it was in a tone she never had heard from him before.

"I suppose I can't have been mistaken," he said. "You really did say that you are a detective—a *female police officer*?"

She bowed her head under the bitter contempt he threw into the last three words. She did not speak.

"If you hadn't said it in such a way that I know it must be true," he went on, "I couldn't believe it. The thing is too vile. Why, woman!" he shouted, in sudden fury, "we've been *lovers!* Lovers! Think of it! And you've been leading me on—making me believe you a pure, true woman, who cared for me as the man you intended to marry! And all the time you were—— God! What fools men are!"

He fell into hysterical laughter—short, discordant barks of spurious mirth that are always so piteous from a man. During this outbreak he seemed to lose all control of himself. He leaned against the table and slapped his knees. He stalked up and down the room. He stood at the window a moment and stared out at the distant waters. But always he laughed, and laughed—without ever looking at her.

"So you were sent to track me down!" he flung at her, at last. "Well, you've done it! You've found me! Is the incident closed—or have you anything else to say?"

With a raising of her shoulders, as she drew a long breath, she replied quietly:

"Yes, I have several things to say."

He had stopped laughing, and was looking at her with eyes as hard as steel.

"I won't try to excuse what I have done," she faltered. "I don't know whether I should, since I am only doing my duty as I see it."

"As you see it! Well?"

"My father was an army officer. I was brought up in the Service. To me it was practically everything. All that took place outside was of slight importance. When I grew older, early in my teens, I wanted to be part of the army in some way. My father ridiculed me at first, but when he saw how determined I was, he discussed my ambitions seriously, and said he would try to get me something to do in the War Department at Washington. One day I met a woman detective. She was dashing, knew all about the army—with a lot of secret things that I never had suspected—and she said she liked me. She told me stories of her adventures in running down deserters. They were full of romance. That decided me. I wanted to be a detective. They made me one, and I was happy. I loved the work. I

reveled in the excitement. But, best of all, I loved to feel that I was working for the old Service." She paused. "And I've done good, too."

He uttered again the short laugh that hurt her so. She shuddered a little, but continued evenly:

"Oh, I *have* done good. You don't believe me, I can see. But I have."

"I don't doubt it. You have captured poor wretches who had run away from their regiments, and Headquarters has praised you. That is doing good, of course. It's what you get your blood-money for."

"I've done good in other ways," she insisted, ignoring his sneer. "I've helped many a young fellow to get through the passing madness that made him desert, and start fair again. That was doing good, of the best kind. When they gave me your case, I was glad."

"Were you? I'm honored that you regard me as a good thing."

"Yes, I was glad, because it looked clean work. I had been called in on a horrid

business in the Seventeenth regiment. But I would have nothing to do with it. The man had murdered an officer and then run away."

Jim Craig clutched the edge of the table against which he was standing, and glared at her. But she did not see it. She could not face him just now.

"I started on this case, as I had on most of my others, full of interest and enthusiasm. I had great difficulty at first."

"Until you found me? Then it was dead easy, wasn't it?"

"No, Jim! It wasn't dead easy, and you know why."

"Can't possibly see why."

"It was because—because—I found very soon—from the first, I think—that I loved you."

"How delightful! Say, you're a wonder!"

"Jim!"

The reproach and pain in her involuntary cry might have touched him if he had not believed her to be utterly, vilely false. He only laughed. Then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he leaned easily against the table to hear what more she might have to say. Re-

action might come later, but at present he had no feeling for her but hatred and contempt.

"Go on," he said. "I beg your pardon for interrupting. You—— What was it you said last? Oh, yes! You found that you loved me. Well?"

"I tried to induce you to give yourself up. You wouldn't do it. Then I made up my mind to sacrifice my work, my duty, my career—everything, and go away with you."

"But you thought better of it? Sensible young woman!"

"Jim!" she broke out beseechingly. "How can you hurt me so?"

"Hurt you? *I hurt you?* You ask that? What of the hurt to me? What of the pain, the loneliness, and the misery you have sentenced me to? I'm not thinking of the hurt; that's a small matter. But you've taken away my hope. You've shown me that in all the world there's nothing to cling to. Why—Heaven help me!—I believed you were in earnest when you put your arms around my neck and said 'I love you!'"

"Look at me!" she interrupted, standing in front of him, with her hands out. "Look at

me, Jim! Can you honestly doubt that I love you? And don't you think I've suffered in my struggle to do right?"

"Struggle!" he echoed scornfully. "A woman doesn't struggle as a man understands it. You may have liked me a little. I suppose I may assume that, since you will insist on it. But what was I compared with this Service that orders you to give me up to death?"

She looked at him curiously as he spoke the last word, but evidently thought he used it only in a figurative sense.

"By your own confession, when it was a question whether you should spare me or seek the favor of your employers, you gave way to them at once. As for your loving me, that was part of the game—like your singing at Reilly's, and the Irish accent, and all the rest of your bag of tricks."

"Jim, I've told you that I shall never do anything in my life that won't be done for love of you. But you won't believe me. How can you be so different from what you were ten minutes ago?"

"Until ten minutes ago I didn't know that

you were a man-hunter, and that I was the man you were after. You told me that you were a deserter, as well as I. Well, you seem to be pretty solid in your job. I don't see any desertion on your part."

"Yes, but it is only for your sake. I love you so well that I want you to go back."

"I'd think more of you if you wouldn't keep on talking about *love*," he shot out savagely.

"What sort of love would mine be," she continued, as if she had not heard him, "if I used it to drag you down, to encourage you in running away from your duty, to help you to live a life of degradation and disgrace and secrecy? Jim! Won't you listen to me, and try to believe that, because I love you, I want you to go back and serve your time like a man?"

He turned on her with a sharp look that seemed to ask her whether she realized what she was talking about. Then, seeing only innocent anxiety in her face, he replied sternly:

"Serve my time? *You don't serve time for murder.*"

She retreated, a step at a time, her horror-stricken eyes on his face. Twice she tried to

speak and failed. Her throat seemed on fire, her head was spinning.

"Jim!" she faltered. "Say that again!"

"What?"

"You don't mean—— But you said——
Murder!"

"Yes. I am wanted for—murder."

The scream that came from her was not loud. Just a thin, low cry—telling of mortal terror and agony combined. It was like the shriek of a wild animal, as the hunter holds a knife at its throat. She dropped on the chintz-covered sofa and rocked herself to and fro. Jim watched her unmoved, still with that half-smile of contempt which had never wholly left his lips since she had revealed to him her profession.

"What's the matter? Are you going to pretend now that you didn't even know the crime of the man you were sent to arrest?"

"No," she answered faintly. "I did not know. I swear I didn't! Murder? They told me it was for striking your superior officer—nothing more. And, oh, Jim! I did it all for you. I wanted to save you from yourself. I thought it the part of love—real love—to do

it. And, and—— Oh, what shall I do? I let them know that you'd be here to-night. And—and—and *they'll be here to take you!*"

A wild, hunted look came into Jim Craig's eyes, and for the second time that night he raised his clenched hand menacingly. But only for an instant. His cold smile turned into a shout of dreadful laughter. Through it he thundered—and the words seemed to carry the majestic import that are conveyed in most Scriptural quotations, especially from the Old Testament:

"The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!" *She* warned her victim, didn't she—when it was too late?"

Madge cowered, as if under a curse. Hardly knowing what she did, in her terror and despair, she threw herself upon him.

"No, Jim—my dear! It is not too late! There's time to get away. I said nine o'clock. The soldiers won't come before."

He pushed her off roughly.

"There isn't time! You know that. Keep away from me."

"There is time, I tell you," breathlessly. "I know. Look here, Jim, dear! Don't be oh-

stinate. Listen to me. If they come before you can get away, go into that other room and hide. If they find you, I'll say you're not the man—that you're my lover, my husband——”

He gave her a look that cut her like a knife across her bosom, as he interrupted:

“Your husband? No! I'm not so low as that!”

“Never mind about words. They don't matter. Jim! if you'll only go and save yourself! You must, I tell you! If you don't, I shall have killed you! Oh, why didn't you tell me before that you'd—— How could I know unless I was told? But you're going to get away—somehow! Let me think!”

“If I didn't know what you are, and had seen how well you can do—at Reilly's, for instance—I might be taken in by all this,” he told her, with a sneer.

She heeded not his cutting words and cruel manner.

“Jim! Jim! Out of that other door—the door of my bedroom! You can get away like that! You must not let them take you! My dear! My dear! If ever you even dreamed you loved me——”



JIM CRAIG WAS A PRISONER, WITH TWO SOLDIERS ON
EITHER SIDE OF HIM

He stopped her with an oath—a foul, blasphemous word that scorched her very soul—and followed it with:

“No! Now I know the kind of woman you are, I’ll let you finish your work. I won’t go. They can take me. You’ve put the rope around my neck. There let it stay.”

There was a knock outside. Madge looked at the clock on the mantel. It was exactly nine!

In sheer desperation—for she knew her act was meaningless—she ran to the door and stood there, her back against it, panting.

“Come away from that door!” he ordered.

Sobbing, spent, with loosened hair and shattered strength, she clutched the handle defiantly and clung closer.

“I won’t!”

He took her by the wrist and swung her aside. As he did so the door was pushed open from without. Lieutenant Collins, with four private soldiers, all in the uniform of Jim Craig’s regiment, stood in the hallway.

Collins looked sharply about the room. He did not recognize Craig. With his mustache gone, much thinner in the face, and in civil-

ian dress, he did not look at all like the man Collins had known at the army post in Kansas.

"Er—Miss Summers——"

But Jim broke in. He straightened up at "Attention!"—heels together and right arm raised in salute—as he shouted:

"It's all right, lieutenant! Come right in!"

Madge darted between them, waving back the soldiers and making as if she would close the door and shut them out.

"Lieutenant!" she said, with a pathetic effort to speak calmly, "I'm very sorry to have given you all this trouble. Our man has not come to-night. I'll—I'll—try to have him here—to-morrow."

Lieutenant Collins—rather slow of perception, it will be remembered—showed that he was perplexed, although he never relaxed his stiff military attitude.

"But——" he began.

"Don't take any notice of this woman," again spoke Jim. "You are looking for James Craig, formerly second lieutenant in your regiment? Well, I am——"

"No, no!" screamed Madge. "He is not the man!"

She caught him by the arm. He thrust her aside with brutal force.

"That woman lies!" he snarled. "I *am* the man!"

Lieutenant Collins flashed out his sword and gave a curt order. The four privates marched into the room with automaton-like precision, and stood facing Jim. More orders, each obeyed promptly as it was given, and in a few seconds Jim Craig was a prisoner, with two soldiers on either side of him, in the hallway outside the door.

"Miss Summers," said the lieutenant, "I will report to Colonel Parsons how well you have managed this case, and that through you the capture was effected without difficulty. With your permission, I will call on you in the morning to tell you what arrangements I may make for the transportation of the prisoner to Kansas, and in the hope that you will accept my escort to the post. Good evening, Miss Summers."

He closed the door, and she heard his voice

outside: "'Tention, squad! Right face! Forward! March!"

The steady tramp, tramp, tramp! down the hallway seemed to Madge like blows upon her heart, beating her down to utter despair.

CHAPTER XVI

ON PAROLE

FOR half an hour after Madge had heard the last echo of the soldiers' footsteps she walked up and down her room, trying to bring her mind into something like order. It seemed to be useless. All she could think of was that she had placed the man she loved in the hands of the hangman. No matter that she had done so unintentionally, the fact remained.

At last, as she looked across at the bay, the sheen of the moonlight upon the waters had its usual soothing effect. She had not stood there half a minute before the tears came. Until then her eyes had been dry and hot, and her half-uttered prayer had been again and again: "If I could only cry!"

With the relaxing in her throat that meant weeping her head cleared. She set herself resolutely to face the situation.

That she would allow Jim Craig to go to his fate, whatever it might be, without fighting in his behalf to the last ditch, was inconceivable. No matter what his resentment toward her, he must be saved. The revelation that he was charged with such an awful crime as murder had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that she must begin all over again with his case. When she supposed him a simple deserter she had known just what to do. Homicide was beyond her.

It had been her firm policy, since entering the Government service, never to pursue a man accused of murder. Military misdemeanors were one thing, capital punishment another. She did not concede the right of any man or set of men to put another to death, no matter what his crime might have been.

"And now I have betrayed the man I would have given my life to save," she murmured. "Yes, Jim, I would take your place at this moment, if I could! I don't know what you are supposed to have done, or whether you are guilty or not. But, as sure as that moon is shining, I would do it. Of course, if you heard me say that, you would laugh, and tell

me talk is cheap. You wouldn't believe I'm in earnest. But I am, dear! Here, alone with the Great Ruler who hears me, I swear I am sincere! Ah! if only there were some way! If there were any way at all!"

She resumed her weary march up and down—her mind keeping step, and, like her walk, leading nowhere!

"What have they done with him, I wonder?" she said, aloud, when, from sheer weariness, she dropped upon the chintz-covered couch. "How will they keep him to-night? They are not going back to Kansas till tomorrow. Surely they can't be going to put him in jail, with criminals—*murderers!*"

She shivered as this word escaped her. *Murderers!* And Jim—her Jim!—was classed as one of them!

Well, why shouldn't he be herded with murderers in jail?

Wasn't that what any virtuous person might demand should be done with him?

"Oh, my love!" she groaned. "You need not have been so cruel to me. If you had known how I suffered, you might have believed. I think any *woman* would. Well, I

suppose his pushing me aside like an unclean thing marked the difference between the sexes. He would have called . . . n's justice. A strong man, as he is, cannot comprehend sympathy and forgiveness as they appeal to women."

She brought herself up short and wiped the last tear from her cheek.

"Madge Summers!" she broke out, in an admonitory tone. "What are you talking about? Here you are, scolding him because he does not behave like a *woman*, when you know very well you love him because he is so thoroughly a *man*!"

She sat still for a long time after that. Her mind was busy. As a detective, she was accustomed to rely on her own resources. Always, when a case was entrusted to her, she deliberately laid out a plan of campaign. It was characteristic of her work that she never proceeded until she knew which way she wanted to go. Then she moved directly toward her goal, brushing aside casual obstacles as a matter of course and without disturbance.

"Half-past ten," she murmured reflectively,

as she looked thoughtfully at the clock. "He ought to be at his hotel by this time. I'll call him up."

There was a telephone in her room. It did not take her long to get Lieutenant Collins on the wire. The gallant officer said he was very pleased to hear her voice. Incidentally, he had no idea who was speaking to him until she had repeated her name half a dozen times. When he did get it into his head, however, he gushed forth into a torrent of talk. In fact, he did not seem to know how to stop. He was a well-meaning young man.

"I called up to ask what you did with your prisoner," she interrupted, with business-like brevity.

"My prisoner? Ah! Yes! Quite so!"

There was a pause, but no information, although Madge had put a straight question. The lieutenant had run dry. Madge tried to start the sluggish stream of his ideas with a repetition of her query.

"What have you done with your prisoner, lieutenant?"

"My prisoner? Ah! Hum! Yes! Which prisoner?"

"I didn't think you had more than one."

"More than one? No, of course not. Say, Miss Summers, that's awfully good! Fine joke! Ladies have much more wit than men. I've always said so. Ha, ha, ha!"

A loud guffaw came hurtling over the wire and made Madge fall back a little. It tickled her ear. What on earth was Lieutenant Collins laughing at? Evidently she had said something dangerously funny without knowing it. Again she tried to make him understand.

"I mean Mr. Craig, formerly a lieutenant in your regiment."

She spoke slowly and very distinctly. This time he understood.

"Oh, yes! Craig! Ah! What a pity! Isn't it, Miss Summers?"

"It is, indeed. But——"

"He's such a fine chap! I hate to take him back. Perhaps he'll get out of his scrape somehow. I don't see how he's to do it, though. Murder, you know! Awful thing!"

All this, of course, was comforting to Madge, who kept herself from sobbing only by the most desperate effort. She could have

driven a hatpin into Lieutenant Collins. But she did not tell him so. With a patience that was angelic under the circumstances, she again put the main question:

"What have you done with your prisoner—Mr. Craig? The man whom you arrested in my sitting-room at the Hotel Waldemar this evening at nine o'clock?"

"Oh, he is in a comfortable bedroom in this hotel. It is next to my own."

"With a communicating door, I suppose?"

"No. His room is entirely separate and shut off from mine," was the unexpected answer.

"He's under guard, of course?"

"No. Alone. His door is not locked, either."

A few chuckles came faintly over the wire. Clearly Lieutenant Collins was enjoying the surprise he believed he was giving her. She waited till the chuckles subsided. Then:

"Aren't you afraid your prisoner will get away?"

"No."

"But you say he is unguarded and in an unlocked room. What measures have you taken to keep him safe?"

"The very best, Miss Summers," in a firmer tone than he had used heretofore. "*He has given his parole!*"

"God bless you, lieutenant!" she blurted out, but emotion made the words indistinct.

"What did you say, Miss Summers?"

"I said I was glad to know Mr. Craig was on his honor."

"Ah! Yes! Of course! That holds a fellow firmer than anything else, you know. He might break out of a prison, or slip manacles off his hands. But when he has pledged his word as an officer and a gentleman, he is his own guard—and—er—you know, that's the most trustworthy one he could have."

"Do you consider him still an officer, when he has run away from his regiment?"

"I consider him a gentleman, Miss Summers."

"And an officer?"

"Until a court-martial decrees otherwise."

Now that he was speaking of matters very near to his heart, the uncertainty in the lieutenant's voice had dropped away. There was a vigor in his utterance in referring to Jim Craig, the officer and gentleman, which would

have assured Madge—even if she ever had doubted it—that Lieutenant Collins was the sort of man who not only would give orders coolly in the face of the enemy's guns, but would fight like a demon in the charge.

"You will leave San Francisco on the midnight train, will you not?" was her next question.

"Yes. There is no other that would suit us so well. I want to see some of my old brother-officers at the fort to-morrow. So I am remaining over a few hours. My prisoner, being on parole, will stay in his quarters here and give me no trouble."

"Of course. I thought of taking the same train. I am going to see Colonel Parsons."

A chuckle of the true Collins brand rattled in the receiver at Madge's ear.

"I am very pleased to hear you say that, Miss Summers. I hope you'll allow me to do what I can for your comfort on the trip."

"You would do that anyhow, lieutenant. I'm sure of that."

There was a *soupçon* of the brogue which gave an added charm to her speech when she chose to use it. Deep as was the wound Jim

Craig had made in her heart, she had too buoyant a nature not to be amused by Lieutenant Collins. This little banter was good for her, too. It relieved somewhat her crushing horror and sorrow.

"Will you let me come for you?" asked Collins eagerly.

"Not necessary. I can ride to the ferry in a taxi. But—here's a favor I have to ask—may I see Mr. Craig to-morrow morning, for a few moments?"

"Most certainly, Miss Summers. He is your prisoner as much as mine. I never could have taken him but for you."

Poor Madge! What wonder that she staggered back from the telephone and pressed her hand to her side? It was true! Jim would *not* have been a prisoner but for her! And there was this chattering booby driving the iron into her soul, with a complacent unconsciousness of doing harm that was maddening. She had to answer him, however. So she pulled herself together, and said, calmly—so it sounded to him:

"Will eleven o'clock do, lieutenant?"

"Excellently, Miss Summers. For that mat-

ter, my time is yours, as I'm sure you understand. Shall I tell Lieutenant Craig you are coming?"

She hesitated. It was so important for her to see him! If he would let her talk to him now, before facing an official investigation, there was a possibility of finding some way out. She had that much faith in herself. But if he knew she were coming, would he consent to see her? His parole gave him the right to exclude visitors. She wouldn't risk it.

"No; please do not tell him," she replied. "Not till I come. I will be there at eleven. Good-by!"

Lieutenant Collins never did know why she cut him off so abruptly. But if he could have seen the other end of the wire he would have understood. So blinded by tears that she could hardly hang up the receiver, Madge Summers was at the limit of her endurance.

She threw herself, face downward, upon the chintz-covered couch. There was a storm of sobs. Merciful Heaven! How she did cry! The convulsion lasted for some time. But—and all gratitude be to beneficent Nature—it ended in a deep, peaceful sleep.

CHAPTER XVII

A FLAG OF TRUCE

THE sun was shining into her room when Madge awoke. Sleeping without a coverlet through the hours in which vitality is at its lowest, she felt cold. But aside from the chill, which soon passed off, she was astonished to find herself so fit, both physically and mentally.

Madge Summers was blessed with a good constitution, and her free, open-air life kept it up to concert pitch. For a few minutes—or hours, even—it might let down, like a fine musical instrument. But only temporarily was she ever out of tune.

Until Jim had turned on her so savagely, and denounced her in such bitter, scalding language, she had felt able to go through with what she had begun without flinching. Then had come the awful arraignment from the man she loved, and she broke down! It was with a

new hope that she found this morning her usual strength had returned—partly, at least.

By the time she was ready to go out, to keep her eleven-o'clock appointment with Lieutenant Collins, she had persuaded herself that it would be comparatively easy to get Jim Craig out of his difficulty. A little tact was demanded; nothing more.

"How is he?" was her first question, as she met Lieutenant Collins in the hotel parlor.

"The old chap isn't very well, I'm sorry to say," was the reply. "He looks uncommonly seedy, and he's in the devil's own—I beg your pardon, Miss Summers. I mean, he's not in a good humor. That's not to be wondered at, of course. I should say a man *would* be grouchy when he expects to be hanged."

Even Lieutenant Collins, with his unfortunate propensity for saying the wrong thing, could not help seeing the shudder with which Madge received this remark. He would have apologized if he had known how to do it. As he didn't, he smiled feebly, and in his nervousness repeated the observation in another form:

"Deuced unpleasant sensation, I should say

—hanging! You can't wonder at poor Craig feeling grouchy."

"May I see him?" asked Madge.

"Well—er—that's the worst of it, you see. Being on parole, I can't force him to do anything he doesn't want. And—er—er——"

"Did he say he wouldn't see me?"

"Well—er—yes. He did, in effect. I told him a lady would like to see him for a few minutes this morning. I didn't mention your name. I only said a lady."

"But he knew who the lady was, didn't he?" demanded Madge impatiently.

"I don't know."

"What did he say?"

Madge's tone was so imperative that the lieutenant felt obliged to give her a full and direct answer. So he spluttered frantically:

"He said 'Damn the lady!' Then I came out, leaving him marching up and down liked a caged—er—— What's that animal that laughs when it's mad? Oh, yes! A hyena—a caged hyena."

There was a rather long pause. Lieutenant Collins, twirling his uniform cap in his hands, watched Madge as she moved about the large

bare apartment—a typical hotel parlor—thinking. She stopped in front of the open piano and idly played with one hand the chorus of a popular song she had often sung at Reilly's. Then, with a suddenness that made Lieutenant Collins drop his cap, she announced:

"I am going up to Mr. Craig's room. Do you mind taking me there?"

"Not at all, if you insist upon it."

"Thanks."

The lieutenant recovered his cap and stood aside, with a bow, as she passed through the doorway. Two minutes later they stepped out of the elevator on an upper floor and Collins knocked at a door.

"Come in!" called out a voice that made all the color leave Madge's cheeks.

They were in the room. Collins had well described Jim Craig as looking "seedy." He seemed twenty years older than when he had come in to see Madge, full of love and hope, the evening before. Usually he was well-groomed. His soldier training had made him careful about that, even when he was drinking and frequenting Reilly's. He had become slovenly in a night. But that his clothes were

of good material and cut, he could have been mistaken for a confirmed "hobo."

"Jim!"

He glared as if he did not know her, but felt instinctively that she was an enemy. She stretched out her hands appealingly.

"Jim! I want to talk to you. Will you let me?"

He did not answer. She took silence for consent. Lieutenant Collins placed a chair and she sat down.

"Shall I go, Miss Summers?" asked Collins.

"I should like you to stay, if you don't mind," was her answer. "I want to ask Mr. Craig a few questions in your presence."

The lieutenant bowed.

"I desire to say to Mr. Craig," she said quietly, "that until last night I had no idea there was any charge against him except that of striking a superior officer and leaving his regiment without permission."

She paused. Jim Craig said nothing, but she saw he was listening.

"Even now," she continued, "I do not know what the specific accusation is."

"Lieutenant Craig is charged with killing Captain Jolin Harrison," said Collins.

"Were there any witnesses?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"One."

"Who was it?"

Lieutenant Collins fumbled with his cap and shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. At last he replied, in a low voice:

"That I cannot tell you."

She was disappointed, but too good a soldier to press the query.

"I'll tell you," suddenly shouted Craig. "It was Mrs. Marston."

Lieutenant Collins shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, old chap," he protested. "You should not have said that. Lawyers for the defense always warn their clients that anything they say may be used against them. If Mrs. Marston's name has to be brought into the case, take my advice and let somebody else do it. I hope Miss Summers will forgive me for saying this. But I am only doing my duty."

"I quite agree with you, lieutenant," she responded. "I was wrong to put the question to Mr. Craig. But for his own sake I was anxious to know how strong a case there was against him."

"Oh, the case is strong enough," snarled Jim. "So strong that there cannot be any mistake."

"Don't say that, old fellow!" pleaded Collins.

"No, don't—Jim——" she added.

"Keep quiet, both of you!" he yelled, in a fury. "I tell you there cannot be any mistake, because—I *admit that I killed him.*"

"Jim! Jim!"

Her imploring voice rang loudly through the room, and Lieutenant Collins pushed against the door to make sure it was tightly closed.

"I killed him, I tell you!" repeated Craig. "I struck him down because—because—he threatened me."

"Then you were justified!" cried Madge eagerly.

"Whether I was justified or not, I did it. But not intentionally. As truly as there is a heaven above, I did not mean to kill him.

When he fell I thought he was only stunned. Mrs. Marston and I tried to revive him. But he would not come to. My blow had been harder than I'd intended, and he never spoke again."

"You mean, after you'd shot him?" suggested Collins.

"I didn't shoot him. I knocked him down with my fist," said Jim curtly.

"Never mind about that," interrupted Madge. "The important fact is that Captain Harrison threatened you, and you were obliged to attack him to prevent his hurting you. There is a splendid defence. It would carry you free out of any court in America."

He turned away and stood at the window, his back to the room. Madge realized that he was not himself, and she wondered whether she could accept all he had said about the circumstances of the killing. Only for a moment did she doubt. He—her Jim—could not commit a cowardly, unprovoked murder.

"Lieutenant Collins, what do you think of it?" she whispered.

"A fairly good defence, I should say. I have felt that from the beginning."

"Fairly good? Is it not perfect?"

"Well—er—you see—there are points against him that the prosecution is sure to use. It's been talked over at the post so often that it is rather fixed in my mind. I'm not much of a lawyer, but some of our fellows in the Sixth are. I'd like to hear them address a jury. Talk about your convincing arguments —"

"What are the points?" she asked.

"Why—er—there were evidences that Craig could have got away without shooting him if he'd cared to do so."

"Shooting? He says he did not shoot—only knocked him down with his fist. How *was* Captain Harrison killed?"

Before Collins could answer, Jim Craig looked around from the window and jerked out angrily:

"Collins, I told you I didn't care to see anybody. I have tolerated this lady for a minute or two because she is a detective, and perhaps has some legal right to badger me. Now, if she has asked all that is in her mind, I should like to be allowed to lie down. I got very lit-

tle sleep last night, and I know there won't be much for me on the train."

He did not look at Madge. His manner was that of one who had an uncertain hold on his mentality, but was fighting hard to talk naturally.

Madge rose and held out her hand to him. He looked at her in surprise, as he might have done had some stranger departed from the conventions without rhyme or reason. With his hands behind him, he turned to Collins:

"Lieutenant, I think you said we would go to the ferry about ten o'clock to-night?"

"Yes. The train does not leave till nearly one. But the sleeping-cars are opened three hours earlier, so that passengers can go to bed if they like. I will have your property brought from your apartment this afternoon. My men will settle with the landlord and bring your things here—clothing and so forth—as you have asked."

Lieutenant Collins saluted his prisoner and stepped outside the door. For an instant Madge and Jim Craig were alone together. She ran toward him impulsively. She would have thrown her arms around his neck.

But the hard glint in his eyes as he raised his right hand in salute—palm outward and thumb bent in—was too much for her. With a faint cry, that was more than half a moan, she walked slowly from him. Then she went out and closed the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITHIN THE LINES

THERE was a warm welcome for Madge from Colonel and Mrs. Parsons when she reached the post. They would not allow her to put up at the hotel in town. She must live in their quarters. This meant that she was made very comfortable, for at every military station the colonel and his family are always as well housed as circumstances will permit.

It was the afternoon following her arrival. She stood alone at the window in Colonel Parsons' office, looking across the parade ground, just as she had on that other bright day, when the troopers were drilling, before she left for San Francisco.

The lawn was not quite so green now. The harvest sun, in its zeal to ripen the wheat that stretched away in all directions for thousands of acres, had slightly yellowed the grass as

well. But it was very restful and beautiful, nevertheless.

Then there was the Flag. As it rippled out from its halyard, it lent just the touch of bright color the scene required to make it perfect. Involuntarily her hand rose to the salute. She had been thinking rather sadly up to this moment. But the flickering shadow of the Colors, darting here and there across the lawn, paused over her head like a benediction, and she smiled.

"I'm going to get him out of this scrape. I know I am. I can see already that the case against him is full of holes. If I don't make some of them wide enough for him to walk through, it will be because he actually is guilty—and that I don't believe."

"Good afternoon, Miss Summers!"

It was the cheery voice of Colonel Parsons. As she turned, Doctor Long, who had entered with him, also bade her good afternoon.

"Miss Summers, you look tired," declared the doctor. "That was a long trip from San Francisco. I hope I'm not going to have you for a patient."

"Good gracious! No, doctor!" she laughed. "What sort of detective should I make if I couldn't stand two or three days in a comfortable Pullman car? Why, I've ridden fifty miles on horseback and not minded it."

"All the same, you seem worn and depressed," put in the colonel. "That comes from fatigue."

"Not always, colonel," she returned, with a wan smile. "Worry does it sometimes."

"That's it exactly," he assented. "You've been worrying over this case of poor Craig until you are unstrung. I'm afraid the wretched, gloomy business is going to do you serious harm."

"No fear of that, colonel. But it's given me a great deal to think about. Never before have I taken a man back to be tried for murder."

The colonel and Surgeon-Major Long exchanged glances. The latter moved to the window and looked out.

"We shouldn't have deceived you, my dear," said the colonel, as he placed a fatherly hand on her shoulder. "I've wanted to tell you, for

a long time, that I am sorry I did not let you have the whole truth at the outset. No, I'm—I'm afraid *you* are suffering, as well as Craig."

There was no mistaking the significance in this last sentence. It told her that Colonel Parsons had seen something she did not think she had shown. Well, she was not ashamed of it. Jim Craig was more to her than any other man she ever had met. No doubt she had betrayed herself to everybody. So it was with something of defiance that she replied:

"Yes, colonel, I *am* suffering."

"And you brought him back in spite of all you may have felt! Fine! Fine! As soldierly as your father's daughter should be."

But she could not accept praise that in her heart she believed to be undeserved. She would make a clean breast of it and ease her conscience—if she could. So she said:

"Don't make any mistake about that, colonel. While I was on this case, I deserted, too."

"Did you? Well, it was natural, I guess. But you fought it out and came back to the old Service of your own accord. That gives you a clean record, my dear."

"No. I never came back really. I deserted

for life," she insisted. "I found I cared more for his military career than for anything, and it was only because I did that I brought him back. You see, my motive was a selfish one. I was not considering only the Service in giving him up."

"But, Miss Summers, you were bringing him back to certain death."

"I didn't know that. If I had——"

She did not finish the sentence, but Colonel Parsons knew perfectly well that Jim Craig would not have been in the guard-house at that moment—as he was—if Madge Summers had had even a suspicion of the main charge against him.

"Colonel," interrupted Doctor Long, turning from the window. "If Miss Summers and you will excuse me, I have to go over to the hospital for a bit. There are some drunks and two or three broken heads waiting for me. Lord! If only the lads would remember how short life is, they would not try so hard to put an end to it!"

"All right, doctor," replied the colonel. "Go ahead! The boys will be glad to see you."

"Humph! I'm not so glad to see them, the

idiots!" snapped the doctor. "By the way, I've got to look after Marston."

Madge listened eagerly. It was in Marston's parlor that Captain Harrison had met his death.

"Marston? Is *he* on the sick list? He always turns out for drill."

"Yes. With his hands shaking so that he can hardly sheathe his sword, and a face like some creature let out of hell for an hour or two! I can't make out what's the matter with the man. He's been living on bromides for weeks."

"Poor chap! He was a friend of Craig's. I suppose he feels it deeply."

"Well," grunted Doctor Long, "there's one thing: His malady won't be aggravated by the usual hysterical sympathy at home. If ever I saw cool, self-centred indifference personified, it is Mrs. Marston."

And the doctor grumbled himself out of the room and stalked over to the post hospital, to look after his drunks and broken heads. Colonel Parsons turned to Madge with more earnestness than he had yet shown.

"My dear Miss Summers, all this is too

much for you. Take my advice and go home to Washington. There will be a court-martial on Thursday—a miserable business, to find out whether we must turn Craig over to the civil authorities for trial. You will be better away from the post when it is going on.”

“It is for the court-martial I want to stay.”

He fixed his keen eyes upon her, noting her slim, neat figure and girlish features. (The latter, by the way, seemed rather to rebel at the determined expression into which she had drawn them.)

“Now, my dear! Out with it!” he said shortly.

“What?”

He gave her a grim smile, as he replied.

“You can’t fool a man as old as I am. I know well enough you have some scheme back of those tired eyes of yours. What are you getting at, eh?”

“Well, I want to stay here—not only for the court-martial, but to go on with my case—the case of James Craig.”

“Your case? My dear girl, you’ve done your work—splendidly. There is nothing more for you to do.”

"Pardon me. I was sent on the case of Captain Harrison's murder—even though I did not know it at first. Therefore I am privileged to keep on until the final decision is rendered." She paused a few seconds, ere she added solemnly: "Colonel Parsons, Lieutenant Craig is innocent of that crime. I am sure of it."

He shook his head.

"Sure of it? Ah, Miss Summers, if I were sure of it, I should be happier than I've been since the horrible thing happened. But the facts are obvious."

"I admit they do appear obvious," she said. "But I have learned that the facts are entangled with a tissue of lies which seem to be meaningless. Now, any falsehoods in a case demand investigation. I should like to find out who told the lies and why."

"The accusation against Craig is proven. And even if it were not, how are you, a young girl, to unearth the scandals of an army post?"

Madge had been seated. She arose from her chair and drew herself up with a dignity which impressed the gruff old soldier, in spite of himself.

"I have a profession, colonel, and it is an important one. You will concede that?"

He bowed his gray head in assent, keeping his eyes on her admiringly.

"Very well, colonel. In that profession it is my business to unearth scandals in all sorts of places. I am a detective—one to whose judgment and ability you must have trusted when you gave me this case. I tell you, as an expert, not as a woman, that an injustice has been done. I thought I was employed to bring back a deserter, and I did it. But you really wished me to find a murderer, and I'm not sure that I have done that."

"You have, my dear. I wish you hadn't. What do you want to do more?"

"It is not only what I want. It's what I'm going to do. When you sent me away less than two months ago, it was to find the murderer of Captain Harrison. You did not instruct me so, but that was what you meant."

He made a shamefaced gesture of affirmation.

"Will, I haven't got the murderer yet. But I'm going to get him for you."

"All right, Miss Summers. We would like

the truth, if we can get it. You know how much time you have before the court-martial. If you think you can find any fresh evidence, why, go ahead."

"Thank you."

"Is there anything I can do to help these investigations along?" he growled.

"Yes, there is. You *could* do me a favor. But I don't know how to ask for it."

"Stuff! Out with it!"

"It is a very big favor I want. But you can grant it, if you will."

"What is it?"

"I want you to let me see Mr. Craig this evening. There are certain things I want to ask him about—that I *must* ask him."

The colonel frowned and stamped up and down the room. It was the way he generally tried to blow off steam when hard pressed. At last, stopping in front of her, he said:

"I'm afraid that is out of the question, my dear. It's against all precedent. Besides, he won't talk to any one—won't open his head. Hasn't since he was brought in. Have you any special reason for expecting him to be communicative to you?"

"No," she answered drearily. "I haven't. But I *must* see him."

"This is not a time for—sentiment."

"I don't want to see him for sentiment. It's business."

"Can't be done."

"Colonel! Please!"

The old war-horse swore below his breath.

"Look here!" he snorted. "It is against all precedent. And he won't talk to any one. And it isn't a time for sentiment. And it's unquestionably bad discipline. And—and—— Well, when do you say you want to see him?"

"This evening. I'll go to the guard-house, if you'll give me a pass."

The good colonel treated himself to another half-audible oath, as he sat down to his desk and pulled a sheet of paper toward him. Then he pushed it away.

"No need to write a pass," he growled. "I wouldn't trust you there alone. In his present state of mind, Craig is dangerous. I'll send Lieutenant Collins with you. Will that suit you? Do you mind having Collins along?"

"I should like it. Lieutenant Collins and I are very good friends."

"All right. That's settled. Now go into the drawing-room and talk to Mrs. Parsons and the girls. They are all dying to put you through a catechism about San Francisco. They have a lot of friends in that city. I don't know whether you went much into society there or not."

"Yes, I went a great deal into society," answered Madge, smiling. "But I don't think the people I met are in the same set as Mrs. Parsons' friends."

"Oh, I guess they are. There's only one society in San Francisco that amounts to anything. At all events, go in and see her."

Madge thought of Reilly's, with "Reddy," Scroggs and the rest, and she smiled slightly.

"I don't think I can just now. I have another engagement this afternoon."

"Another engagement? How? What? Oh, very well! In that case we shall see you at dinner, of course—before you go to Craig?"

"Thank you, colonel, I shall trespass on you for dinner," she answered, as she walked to the door. "And thank you so much for allowing me to talk to Mr. Craig."

"You can see him—because I have promised

you. But—by George! I'm not so sure there'll be any talking."

"I'll have to take chances on that."

She went out and walked straight to the quarters of Lieutenant Marston. That was her other engagement!

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER FIRE

IT is usual enough in an army post for the wives and daughters of officers to visit each other. Indeed, the social life of a garrison is of more importance to them than all the military problems that trouble their husbands put together. Afternoon calls go on, even though a declaration of war may just have been made. Drilling, parading, and fighting are men's work. The women must amuse themselves. How can they do that better than in gossiping? So, when the maid belonging to the Marston household announced "A lady to see you, ma'am!" Mrs. Marston bounced off the sofa, where she was pretending to do something in the embroidery way, and stood ready to welcome her caller.

A handsome woman was Blanche Marston—but of a loud type. There was rather too pronounced a red-and-white coloring in her

face, and perhaps a shade too much assurance in her demeanor. A vague rumor was afloat that she had been a "show girl" before George Marston married her. His brother-officers liked her all the better on that account. They regarded her, and spoke of her, among themselves, as "a good fellow."

Things had not been pleasant for Blanche after the tragedy in her sitting-room on the night that Jim Craig disappeared. The general attitude toward her was one of half-contemptuous pity. It had been common talk that she had been indiscreet—not to use a stronger word—with Captain Harrison, the murdered man. It was further said that she had flirted with Craig, but not seriously.

Marston knew all this after the slaying of Captain Harrison, even if he had not before. He was of a fiercely jealous disposition, and nowadays everybody was sure his wife heard from him pretty often about her intrigue with Harrison. As for Craig, that affair was only a peccadillo, and he could afford to look over it.

It was not likely so shallow a creature would feel real distress over the killing of one man

by another for her sake. Some of the regimental women declared she was secretly pleased, because it flattered her vanity. Others took the charitable view that perhaps there never had been anything between her and Harrison, after all.

As Madge entered, Mrs. Marston put out a hand tentatively. But Madge merely bowed.

"This is Mrs. Marston?"

"Ye-es."

"My name is Summers—Miss Madge Summers."

The white in Blanche Marston's face suddenly covered a larger area than usual, displacing some of the pink. But it was in a perfectly controlled voice, with a dash of patronage, that she returned:

"Ah! Yes. The detective? I've heard of you. Sit down, won't you?"

Madge saw that in the matter of nerve she had met her match. It gave her a thrill of pleasure. In the anticipation of a duel worth while, she felt a warm tingle all through her. It was in her gentlest tone that she said, as she seated herself:

"I hope you won't think me too much of a

nuisance. I've come to ask your help with regard to Lieutenant Craig."

"Oh, yes," purred Blanche. "The deserter you brought back a little while ago. I don't see how *I* can help you."

"I understand it was in your house that the murder took place."

Madge emphasized the word "murder," and looked straight into Blanche Marston's baby-blue eyes. There was not a quiver of a lash so far as she could detect.

"Hard as nails!" was Madge's inward comment.

"Excuse me, Miss Summers," said Blanche amiably, after a pause. "But—er—are you still retained in the case? I gathered that your professional duties had been performed—admirably, I don't doubt—and that they were now entirely at an end."

"That's true. Officially my connection with the case is over. My investigation now is on my own account. I am doing it quite independently, for my personal satisfaction."

"Rather an unusual proceeding for a detective, isn't it? I should have thought you would be glad to drop the case from your mind

when you had finished your work, and—been paid for it. I presume you *have* been paid.”

The intention to be insolent was obvious. Madge made a mental note of it, but took no outward heed.

“I have been making a few inquiries since I returned from the West,” she said, in a matter-of-fact way, “and I am rather puzzled by what I have learned. There seems to be something more in the affair than I first suspected.”

Blanche had been reclining in a graceful attitude on the sofa, flinging her remarks at Madge over her shoulder. She knew, by experience, that that sort of thing was most irritating. Now she suddenly sat up, to ask sharply:

“Do you think, Miss—er—Summers, that Colonel Parsons would approve of this—er—unofficial investigation?”

“I feel very sure,” was the prompt rejoinder, “that Colonel Parsons would sanction any investigation, official or unofficial, which proved to him that a—mistake—had been made.”

She stabbed the word “mistake” at Mrs. Marston purposely. She could not be certain

that that pink-and-white personage changed color—her “make-up” was baffling—but she saw the blue eyes close a little for an instant.

“Well, my dear Miss Summers, of course, everybody will be delighted if you can do anything to make poor Lieutenant Craig’s case appear less damaging. He was *such* a nice boy!”

“You knew him very well?”

“I—er—Lieutenant Marston did.”

“Why, I meant, of course, Lieutenant Marston and yourself.”

The wondering tone in which Madge made this reply cut deeply. Blanche saw that she had betrayed herself, and she broke out, seemingly reckless of what she said:

“As I suppose you know, it—the tragedy—took place in our parlor. But I knew nothing of it at the time. Captain Harrison had been calling. It was late, and I was tired. I went upstairs to bed. The captain took a book and said he would wait for my husband. I fell asleep. The first I knew of the murder was when Mr. Marston came in and told me Captain Harrison had been shot.”

“Shot? I thought he was killed by a blow.”

The sudden look of terror and bewilderment in Blanche Marston's eyes was a confession that she knew she had said too much.

"He was shot through the heart," she said, as she recovered herself a little.

"But you did not hear the shot?"

"No. My room is upstairs."

"Overhead?"

"Yes. That is—no, not exactly overhead. At the back of the house. But I am a very sound sleeper. Besides, I am so used to the noise of firearms——"

She was talking very fast and nervously. Madge's heart beat hard. She recalled occasional references to a shot—by Lieutenant Collins, among others—that she had not understood, but to which she had paid little attention at the time.

"Please tell me," she said. "I'm stupid about all this. What proof is there that Mr. Craig killed the man?"

Blanche Marston, fighting to keep her nerve, replied glibly:

"My husband found him standing over the body, with the pistol in his hand."

"Then you were not a witness. It is only on Lieutenant Marston's testimony that——"

"It is on the testimony of Mr. Craig having quarreled with Captain Harrison," came the quick interruption. "It's on the testimony of his having run away—and his pistol on the floor. That is enough, it seems to me."

There was a short silence. Madge said meditatively:

"He put his pistol down on the floor, and Lieutenant Marston let him run away. It is a curious case."

Blanche sprang to her feet, in a storm of rage and terror. She had trapped herself, and she knew it. Why had she consented to talk to this girl at all, with her innocent manner and calm voice? Why hadn't she insisted on the detective seeing her husband? He was clever and could lie well. She was not a bright woman, as he had told her more than once. When her wits were confused by panic, she became a downright imbecile.

"Miss Summers," she panted. "I don't in the least know the object of these questions, nor what you are trying to—to—prove. But

I do know that your attitude is—is insufferably insolent. You are speaking as if you really thought Lieutenant Marston and I were trying to hide something. It's preposterous! As for my husband having let Jim Craig go, he struggled with him and wrenched the pistol out of his hand. Mr. Craig was my husband's friend. You are, perhaps, too—too business-like—to understand how one man might give another—a comrade whom he loved—one last chance to get away."

"That was a clever switch," thought Madge. "I didn't think she had it in her. A comrade whom he loved, eh? Ah!"

She got up from her chair, her gaze wandering casually to the door where Captain Harrison had appeared on that night, to meet his death soon afterward.

"Thanks, Mrs. Marston," she said, with a slight bow. "You've helped me a great deal."

"Have I?"

What was this girl-detective driving at?

"Indeed you have," smiled Madge. "Chiefly because you have shown me just how much truth there was in my own conjectures. I can

quite see, after hearing your account of it, what a perfectly clear, simple case it is."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. So I think I'll just tell Colonel Parsons I shall leave in the morning. I don't want to wait for the court-martial."

Ah! She was going away! In the reaction of great relief, Blanche became gracious. Smilingly she complimented Madge on her professional achievements. She could not resist her cattish tendency to throw in a scratch, in the guise of good-humored candor, however.

"I am glad to have been able to set you right in some of the details of this dreadful affair," she said. "Even the cleverest detectives overreach themselves a bit sometimes, don't they? And I want to beg your pardon for losing my temper a minute ago. Of course, I shouldn't have minded what you said. In your rather unpleasant business you detectives have to depend largely on your imaginations. Everybody knows that."

"Yes, our imaginations do bother us a great deal sometimes," returned Madge sweetly. "For instance, I am still wondering why Mr.

Craig should have followed Captain Harrison to your house and killed him there."

"He was drunk."

"Oh, *was* he?"

"I—I've heard so. Who knows what men quarrel about?"

"What makes you think they quarreled?"

"Why, they must have——"

"But you see," insisted Madge, in her most serious detective manner, "that is an important point. If we could thoroughly establish that Captain Harrison and Mr. Craig really quarreled violently about anything, it would practically remove all doubt of Mr. Craig's guilt."

"Well, they *did* quarrel. I know, because I heard them."

Madge wrinkled her forehead, but only slightly, as she said, in her most winning tone:

"My dear Mrs. Marston, now that all this disagreeable business has been talked over and done with, I'm going to ask you a favor."

Blanche started in evident alarm. What was coming now? But Madge, smiling still more sweetly, soon reassured her.

"It's nothing dreadful—only silly. You see, I'm going to call on Colonel Parsons, and—"

I've forgotten my powder-puff. Would you lend me——"

It *was* a silly thing to ask, no doubt. But, for some reason it frightened Mrs. Marston. She stammered something, and seemed to be seeking for an excuse, when Madge, who had been looking into her hand-bag, continued—her smile becoming a deprecatory laugh:

"Why, how stupid of me! Here's my puff, in my vanity-box. I shan't have to trouble you, after all. Good-by—and thank you so much."

She looked about the room, as if she did not quite remember where the outer exit was. Then, before Blanche could interfere, she had moved swiftly over to the door whence Captain Harrison had emerged that night, and flung it wide open.

It was a bedroom! One swift glance at the dainty furnishings, the pretty fripperies, the full-length mirror, and the dresser—littered with powder, perfumes, hatpins, bits of ribbon and lace, and other feminine accessories—told Madge that it was Mrs. Marston's bedchamber.

Blanche had lied when she said she slept upstairs. Madge Summers had had good reason

to think so before she saw the room. She had taken the trouble to learn the plan of the Marston house from Lieutenant Collins, on the train from San Francisco. If she were going to help the man she loved, she must know all the details that might be pieced together for his benefit.

"Miss Summers!" cried Blanche, in indignant protest. "That is not the way out."

"No, I see it is not, my dear Mrs. Marston. But, as I said just now, I am so stupid about some things. Good afternoon!"

With the smile that Blanche could not fathom, Madge bowed and went out, closing the door behind her. As she walked across the parade-ground, her step was lighter than it had been before the interview.

Mrs. Marston was watching her angrily from behind the lace curtains of her sitting-room. Madge knew that, too. She was a woman, and therefore versed in the ways of her sex.

CHAPTER XX

A FLANK MOVEMENT

THE great discrepancy between Jim Craig's story of the homicide and that of every one else about the post Madge had not yet reconciled. It had come to her first in San Francisco, and again on the train. Lieutenant Collins had said what she had just heard from Mrs. Marston—that Captain Harrison had been shot and that Lieutenant Craig's pistol was found by the side of the body. Other persons had mentioned a shot. Jim's own account was that he had struck the man down with a blow of his fist, and that it had killed him. Jim would tell the truth. She was sure of that.

If Captain Harrison was shot, as many witnesses testified, who shot him?

Blanche Marston knew. There was the person who held the key to the whole situation. Madge's little ruse about the powder-puff had

helped to make that clear. To get the puff, Blanche would have had to go to her bedroom, and thus have convicted herself of falsehood in saying that she slept upstairs.

Allowing that she had been in her room when Captain Harrison was shot, she must have heard the report of the pistol, even if the noise of the quarrel had not reached her. But Madge did not believe that she was asleep at all.

"I am positive that woman saw Captain Harrison killed," she meditated, half aloud, as she reached her bedroom in the Parsons' home. "What is more, I believe she was the prime cause of the trouble. I wish Jim had never cared for such an empty-headed, heartless creature. But the average man is not a saint. And my boy is an average man—God bless him! It is not hard to understand how she could have fascinated him—in a way. Such women are attractive to men to a degree. They can't hold them very long. But for the little time a woman of that kind does keep a man—such a one as Jim, for instance—he is entirely at her mercy. He would go to perdition for her sake. And very often he does."

She took off her hat and threw it aside carelessly. The fact that it rolled from a chair to the floor and was permitted to stay there would prove, if there were nothing else, that the young lady was in a disturbed state of mind. Her head felt hot. So she loosened her hair and let it fall over her shoulders.

As she stood in front of the mirror, pushing back the thick hair with her two hands, her pale face became very haggard.

"The court-martial will be the day after tomorrow," she mused. "They will hold a preliminary investigation, and then—he will be turned over to the civil authorities to be tried for murder!"

The afternoon sunshine, pouring through the open window, had made the lowered shade too hot to touch. But she shivered, notwithstanding, as she murmured:

"How I do hate a criminal court! The close room—for it always is close; the grim bench, with the high desk and railing, so that you can see only the judge's head and shoulders; the twelve jurymen—such a miscellaneous lot of unsympathetic men; the counsel, in their plain citizens' clothes; the court officers, buzzing

about full of importance; the musty-looking people—most of them brought there only by curiosity—in the seats for the public; the witness, all in a white sweat as he is badgered by the lawyers. And, in the middle of it all, the pale-faced man who may leave that room only for a stone cell and—the hangman!”

She sat down on the edge of the bed and put her hands to her face. As Blanche Marston had remarked about detectives in general, Madge had a strong imagination, and she had conjured up a picture that was as real as if it were before her eyes.

“There is nothing in that kind of court which suggests chivalry or a man fighting on even terms,” she continued. “It is all so hideously one-sided. At a court-martial it is just the opposite. To begin with, everything *looks* different, from the military uniforms to the Stars and Stripes draped behind the presiding officer! Why, the Flag alone gives assurance at once that the case is to be tried on its merits, and those only. There is nothing of prejudice against the prisoner in a court-martial. The witnesses tell simply what they know, and, as a rule, they would rather soften it for him, if

they could. They are soldiers—his comrades! A soldier should not be tried for anything except by soldiers. That's my opinion."

Madge Summers was the daughter of an army officer, and therefore prejudiced in favor of military tribunals. Never till now, however, had she felt so bitter toward the judicial machinery of civil life. But then, this was the first time anybody she cared for was likely to be placed at the mercy of an ordinary criminal court.

She rather dreaded her coming interview with Jim Craig, much as she longed to see and talk with him. At the same time, she could not hope to do anything save with his co-operation. No matter how treacherous and vile he might think her, he must be made to believe she was working sincerely for his good now. She had been doing so all along. That she knew; but he didn't.

Madge had not seen Jim except at a distance, since her futile attempt to talk to him in Lieutenant Collins' hotel in San Francisco. How contemptuously he had thrown her off then! What would he say now?

She looked at herself in the mirror with a

mournful smile. Her face, with its sunken eyes and lines of care, framed by the great mass of dark hair, was not one to attract a fastidious man, she thought. Madge never was vain over her personal appearance, pretty girl as she was. Now she honestly wondered what there was about her that ever had found favor with Jim Craig.

As for the case against him, that must either stand or melt away, according as he admitted or denied the truth of Mrs. Marston's statement. Should he maintain that he did not shoot Captain Harrison, Madge had little doubt full proof would be forthcoming. She would hunt up that proof, if she had to rend the whole garrison apart. They should not have her boy while she could raise a hand in his behalf. And let it be remarked that Madge Summers was a fighter, especially when there was the life of an innocent man—and her own man, at that—to fight for.

"It's that woman, Marston, I have to look out for," she murmured. "She lied about her bedroom and denied that she heard the fuss, when I know she did hear it. Why she lied I don't know yet. But I shall. Perhaps, like

many selfish women, she desired to keep herself out of an unpleasant case. Perhaps she wanted to save some one else—the real murderer. Then, again, perhaps there was something to hide more dangerous to her than the little matter of a man's life. I'm not sure of my ground yet. But that's only because I've been used to dealing with men. I have to find out into what depths of deceit and treachery a really bad woman can fall."

She was silent for some moments. But it relieved her to think aloud. She often did it when she had a puzzling case and was alone. So it was not long before she broke out again, in a low tone:

"She *is* a bad woman. I'm convinced of that. She looks like one, and—unless I am more mistaken than I am generally when I get a thing into my head—she has been acting like one. But I'll beat her! I will, as sure as I stand in this room now. No, Mrs. Blanche Marston, you needn't think you can ruin Jim Craig while I stand by. You can fight against a man who has right on his side—power, influence, justice—and sometimes you can defeat him. But there is something that will win out against

you every time. Something *that* is as strong and big as truth. Something that comes from the heart of the woman who loves him—who *knows* that he is innocent. You can't fight that, Mrs. Marston. You can't fight that."

The musical "Ta-ra-ra-ra!" of a bugle, calling out the squad who were to lower the Colors, warned her to get ready for dinner. It was sunset. She peeped out by the side of the window-shade to see the flag descend. Somehow she could not help feeling that it was sacrilege to haul down the emblem she loved so dearly—even for the prosaic reason that it is the military custom to do so every night.

"I like to see it streaming out there," she said softly. "When it whips out in the wind it seems to be setting all evil at defiance. Surely there is more badness abroad at night than in the daylight, when the sun is shining. Then why *shouldn't* Old Glory stay up all night? I guess even the colonel would laugh at me for saying that. But I can't help my reverence for the flag. I don't know that I would if I could. . . . Besides, its shadow falls right across the guard-house, where *he* is. I wish it could

remain there till he comes out, a free, vindicated man."

Boom! The sunset gun!

Practiced hands pulled on the halyard. The great spread of red-white-and-blue fluttered spasmodically for an instant, as if in rebellion. Then it slid smoothly down the pole into the hands of the soldiers at the bottom.

"Well, it's down," she murmured. "But it will go up again at daybreak. After all, isn't that a good omen for my boy? He has been pulled down as the shadows gather. But he will rise again in the sunshine of innocence in the morning."

Miss Madge Summers sighed. Then she shook off the vapors that threatened to get the better of her clear common sense, and plunged her face into a bowl of cold water. It was the first of her preparations for dining with Colonel Parsons and his family.

When, an hour afterward, she appeared in the dining-room, in a fresh white gown, with a new ribbon at her throat, her abundant hair dressed in the latest style, and her face radiant in its girlish beauty, the colonel sniffed his admiration, and growled:

"I've been telling Mrs. Parsons that you seemed tired out. By gad! I'm an old fool! I never saw you look better than you do this evening. Either I couldn't see plainly this morning, or you've done something in the last few hours to take all the worry out of your face. Perhaps you've heard good news of some kind."

"I've heard news, colonel," she replied, smiling. "Whether it is good or not, I can't tell yet."

"About this case of Craig's, or——"

"Colonel!" interrupted Mrs. Parsons warningly.

The colonel saluted his wife with two fingers to his forehead.

"Present, my dear! I forgot. I'm always talking about things at the wrong time. What's this, Mary?" to the maid who had just place a silver tureen before him. "Tomato soup? Good! The service may be going to the dogs, as Doctor Long likes to say; but, by gad! there's nothing wrong with our commissary department."

The dinner was a pleasant occasion—it always was at the table of Colonel Parsons—

and Madge was rather astonished to find herself in excellent spirits, as well as appetite.

But, afterward, when, with Lieutenant Collins, she walked across the parade-ground in the moonlight toward the room where Jim Craig was a prisoner, the tears ran down her cheeks steadily. She was only a girl, after all—a girl whose lover was in deadly peril.

CHAPTER XXI

GETTING THE RANGE

ACCUSTOMED as Madge was to the impersonal rigidity of military discipline, she shuddered as she entered the guard-house. The coldness of it all appalled her. She could not have explained why. In the course of her three years as an army detective it often had been her business to see men in garrison prisons. Yet, on this night, the bare, white-washed walls, the iron-grated doors, the impassive sentry, the hollow echoes, and the chill of an atmosphere that the sun never warmed, affected her as if she were encountering them for the first time.

"I hope he'll talk to you," said Collins, as they waited at the outer door while the sergeant examined the colonel's order admitting them.

"I think he will," was her composed reply.

Collins looked doubtful. The sentry who

had filled the doorway to bar their progress, as the Regulations required, moved aside and presented arms.

They entered the large main room, and the sergeant unlocked the iron door of a fair-sized chamber which was Jim Craig's cell. It was furnished with a cot, table, and chair. On the wall, under the small barred window, was a mirror. This room, like all other parts of the guard-house, was whitewashed. A lighted coal-oil lamp stood upon the table.

Madge stopped as soon as she was inside. It seemed like an unwarranted intrusion to be going into this room without invitation. She could hardly realize it was a prisoner they were to see. For Jim Craig, reading at the table by the evil-smelling lamp, seemed as tranquil as if he had been lounging in the comfortable officers' quarters he had occupied before he ran away. His elbows were on the table, his head resting on his hands. He did not look up when they entered.

"He sits like that all the time," whispered Collins. "Except when he's marching up and down. You can't wonder at it, can you?"

She held up a finger for silence and walked

over to the side of the sad figure bent over the book.

"Jim!"

So softly she spoke that he may not have heard. At all events, he did not move. He seemed to be absorbed in his book. Madge saw that it was a volume of Shakespeare.

"Jim," she repeated. "Jim!"

Still he did not look up. But he must have heard this time. She persevered, very gently and timidly:

"Jim! My dear! I know you can't forgive me—yet. But listen, please. Colonel Parsons has let me come here because I told him I believed I could clear you."

Calmly he turned over a leaf of his book and went on reading at the top of the next page.

"Don't you understand?" she pleaded. "I'm asking you to speak to me—for your own sake only. If you'll just help me, and work with me, I—I—— Oh, Jim, dear!—I believe we can straighten this out and prove that it's all been a mistake."

He laid his book on the table, face downward, and deliberately turned to look at her.

"It can't have been a mistake," he said—

and he did not show surprise, pleasure, disapproval, or any other sentiment with regard to her presence. "I killed him right enough. I wouldn't have done it if I'd been sober, for she wasn't worth it. But I did kill him, and, what's more, he ought to have been killed."

Before Jim had turned his book over, Madge's quick eye caught what he had been reading. It was the scene in "Othello" in which Michael Cassio expresses remorse for his drunkenness. It was over that passage Jim Craig had been musing—so deeply that he had not noticed them coming in.

His eyes were strained and bloodshot, his voice high and sharp. That his nerves were all a-jangle any one could see. It was evident that he hardly knew what he was saying. Suspense and hopeless brooding had unhinged him. How she would have liked to take his poor fevered head in her arms and whisper that he had nothing to fear!

"Tell me about it," she whispered coaxingly.

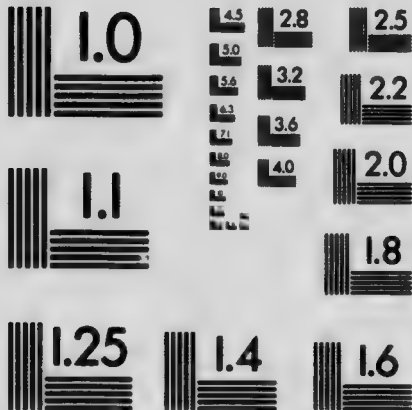
But he turned away with a sullen frown.

"I've said too much already. Now will you please let me alone?"



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"Just a moment," she begged, and her tone was so low that Lieutenant Collins did not know what she said. "There are one or two things I don't quite understand. Jim dear, forget who I am. Don't think of me as the Madge you——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and the gesture hurt her. It said so plainly that who or what she was had no interest for him. But with resolution she put away her own emotions. She was working for him—her lover—now.

"Forget who I am," she repeated. "Forget everything and answer me just three questions. First, when you shot Captain Harrison, what did you do with the pistol?"

He stared at her, with some faint animation in his face. Then he answered, with sullen emphasis:

"I didn't shoot him. I knocked him down."

He turned from her and muttered something—with an oath in it—below his breath. Madge could not catch the words.

"Yes?" she prompted. "You knocked him down?"

"He fell flat upon his back on the carpet, and lay quite still. He was very white, and she

said I had killed him. We tried to revive him, but couldn't. Then I went away."

Ma'dge forced all emotion out of her voice as she went on with her questioning:

"You are quite certain? You—you've said you weren't—weren't yourself, dear. Are you certain you remember distinctly?"

"You mean I was drunk? Well, yes, I was. But I remember everything. I didn't even have my pistol with me. It was in my quarters, and—afterward—I didn't dare go back for it. Pity I didn't. I'd have shot myself decently before this."

"Another question, Jim. Did you see Lieutenant Marston that night?"

"No."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all."

"It was at his house, though—wasn't it?"

"He was on duty for the evening. That was why I——"

The ache that Madge always felt at her heart now became a little more acute. She understood why he had stopped explaining. He had gone to that house for the same reason that Harrison was there. They had both been

in love with the woman. Into what an abyss of jealous misery would her search for the truth lead her. Never mind! She could bear what might come in that way. She must—for this was all for Jim! Her own feelings were nothing. She turned her honest eyes upon him. He did not meet them.

"That's all, Jim," she said quietly. "I shan't ask the third question now. But—dear! Won't you—won't you speak to me before we part?"

"I *have* been speaking to you. Lieutenant Collins, there, can testify to that. I don't know why I did it. I swore I never would exchange a word with you again."

"I don't mean the way you have been speaking," she cried piteously. "I wanted you to say something as if you remember when you thought you—loved me. Dear, look at me! I'm eating my heart out! I'm living in a long torment because of you. Still, that is nothing. I'd die and suffer for ever and ever, if I could do you any good. Don't you believe me, Jim?"

"You said a great many things of that sort the night you—gave me up."

There was so much scorn in his voice that

it was not even resentful. Madge bent her head and fought till she had conquered the hot, heavy tears that were struggling up into her eyes.

"All right," she said, at last. "I'll just go ahead—alone—and do what I can to save you. Isn't there anything you will say to me before I go?"

"What is there to say?" he returned coldly.

"Nothing. No, of course. There is nothing. Lieutenant Collins, we won't annoy Mr. Craig any longer."

"Very well, Miss Summers. I am at your service."

As he said this, the good-natured Collins stepped up to Jim Craig and patted him on the shoulder. Then he offered his hand, which, after a slight hesitation, Jim took.

"All right, Collins! I appreciate the way you and the other boys are standing by me in this," he said, in low, shaky tones. "I don't think I deserve it, after the measly thing I've done. So it's all the more comforting that you give me your hand, in spite of that. You understand, don't you, old fellow?"

"Of course, I do," returned Lieutenant Col-

lins, ready to blubber. "It's a rotten shame that you should have got into a mix-up of this kind. But I'm in hopes that you'll pull out of it somehow. Miss Summers seems to think you will, and we all have a lot of faith in her."

He made no reply to this. But he bowed gravely as the lieutenant and Madge moved to the door. When they were outside, in the large room, Madge turned to look at him, in the vague hope that she might catch his eye. He was again buried in his Shakespeare.

"I'm sorry there was no favorable result from your visit, Miss Summers," said Collins, as they crossed the parade-ground in the moonlight.

"Ah, but there is a favorable result, lieutenant. I have Mr. Craig's testimony that he knocked Captain Harrison down with a blow of his fist, but that he did not shoot him. Yet you and all the others agree that the man was shot."

"Yes, through the heart."

"But, Jim—Mr. Craig—says he did not even have his pistol with him that night. How do you reconcile that with the story that he shot Harrison?"

The good lieutenant did not try to explain. The case was getting beyond his mental powers. So he smiled feebly in silence. After a few moments she said, rather timidly:

"Could you take me over to Mr. Craig's old quarters—the rooms he occupied at that time? Or is there somebody there? I suppose they are occupied, aren't they?"

"Well—er—yes, Miss Summers. They are, in a way. In point of fact, I'm living in them now. You see, Jim Craig and I had three rooms. We used the same sitting-room with our bedrooms on opposite sides. Since he went away no one has taken his bedroom."

She was interested in all this, as her manner showed.

"You were there that night, then? Did you hear anything of the trouble? Did you see him when he came to his quarters—afterward?"

"No. I was in my room, with my door closed. If he went to his bedroom, I should not be likely to hear him unless he made an unusual noise."

"No, I suppose you wouldn't," she agreed thoughtfully. "Would it be possible for me to see his empty room and the sitting-room?"

It *was* possible, and in about three minutes Madge was in the small room in which Jim Craig had slept. She took in all its furnishings at a glance. She looked at the plain camp bed, at the locker where he had kept his small-arms and ammunition, and into the clothes-closet, with its row of hooks and its pungent smell of leather from boots and leggings.

"Do you know where he kept his pistol, lieutenant?"

She put the question casually, as she stepped back from the clothes-closet.

"Why—er—I suppose in that locker. That's where we generally have them—when we take the trouble to put away our things at all."

"Lieutenant Craig was neat and orderly in his ways, was he not? I think I've heard that."

"Yes—much better than most of the fellows. Come to think of it, I never saw his pistol, or anything else of his belonging to the Service, lying around loose."

"That's what I wanted particularly to know."

"Ah! Oh! Did you? I tell you what it is, Miss Summers. You remind me of Sherlock Holmes. You know—that fellow who

asked questions that seemed to have no bearing on a case, but which always led direct to the mystery. For instance——”

“Yes, lieutenant, I’ve heard of Sherlock Holmes,” she interrupted good-humoredly. “But I am not conceited enough to think I have his gifts. Can you open that locker for me?”

“I dare say I can, Miss Summers. The key is in the door. But the locker is empty.”

He took hold of the key as he spoke and tried to turn it. But the lock would not yield.

“This lock always was awkward,” he explained, as he wriggled the key. “I never knew it to open the first time.”

Madge made no comment. Just then the key turned and the door opened, making a loud creaking as it did so. There was nothing in the locker then, as the lieutenant had said. She closed the door herself and locked it. Then she

don’t see how anybody could open this door without your hearing it, unless you were sound asleep.”

“No, that’s true,” assented the lieutenant eagerly. “And I remember now that——”

She held up her hand to stop him.

"Lieutenant Collins, would you mind keeping that to yourself until to-morrow?"

"Why, of course. I——"

"Because I intend to ask questions of several people in Colonel Parsons' office then. It may simplify matters for the court-martial."

Lieutenant Collins looked at her in admiration, tinged with doubt. But the doubt gradually faded away. He had come to believe that this girl, with her quiet manners and direct methods, could accomplish anything.

"Good night, lieutenant. And thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken."

She put out her small, gloved hand. As he took it he stammered that it had been no trouble—that he had enjoyed it. Anyhow, he'd do anything for Craig, poor chap!

The squeeze she gave his fingers would have proved to the honest Collins that he had said the right thing then, if he never had before. He looked after her as she entered Colonel Parsons' house and murmured, with a sentimental upturning of his eyes:

"I'd be almost willing to change places with Craig if it would make her feel toward me as she does to him."

CHAPTER XXII

SH/ RPSHOOTING

WHEN Madge appeared in Colonel Parsons' drawing-room, after leaving Lieutenant Collins, she found herself in an atmosphere of gaiety which was good for her, whether she realized it or not. They were a musical family. One of the colonel's daughters was at the piano, while the other helped her sister to sing. The father took part now and then, when the melody appealed to him. It happened that he was roaring out one of the old camp songs of the Sixties just as Madge entered.

He stopped to greet her. But she made him go on, and soon she was singing, too, as heartily as any of them. Not that she had forgotten Jim for a moment. Only, it was one of her principles not to obtrude her troubles or perplexities when it could be avoided.

But just before she left the room, to go to

bed, she got the colonel in a corner, and whispered:

"Colonel, I saw Mr. Craig to-night."

"Yes, of course you did. You went to the guard-house for that purpose. Did you get any satisfaction?"

"Not much."

"I didn't suppose you would. But I'm glad you saw him, anyhow. Now you know how useless it is trying to prove that black is white."

"Yes, colonel. It was very hard to make him talk. That is—to talk to me."

She said this so sadly that the colonel's voice was more sympathetic than before, as he said:

"My dear Miss Summers, I'm sorry for your disappointment. But, as I told you, to any one knowing the facts there can't be much doubt as to who killed Captain Harrison."

"No, colonel. To any one knowing the facts there certainly cannot be much doubt."

The odd tone in which she uttered this commonplace sentence convinced Colonel Parsons that it concealed a deeper meaning than appeared on the surface, and he gave her a keen look.

"You're convinced, then?"

"Entirely," she returned, in the same enigmatical way. "I know who the murderer is, and I also know who the murderer is not. The main difficulty is going to be in keeping the innocent man from proving himself guilty."

"This sounds like a riddle—a regular Sphinx riddle," growled the colonel.

"Does it? Well, you know the riddle of the Sphinx was solved at last. Who knows what may happen to this one?"

She paused a moment to exchange a smiling "Good night" with the colonel's two daughters. Then, in a swift, business-like way, she went on speaking to the colonel:

"To-morrow morning I want you to have in your room, facing the parade-ground, the officers who were there the day I first entered it. Oh! Yes. And Corporal Thwayte, who was acting as orderly at that time. Please have him there, as well."

"Really, my dear girl! I hardly think I can——"

She broke in sharply:

"Colonel Parsons, I'm not asking a favor

now. It is something that *must* be done. It is in your power to give an innocent man a chance for his life. And you're going to do it."

The colonel stared blankly for a moment. But the look she shot back told him she was going to have her way. With a shrug, he growled:

"Gad! No wonder you can make the boys do what you want. I've never been so ordered about in all my life."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"At what time?"

"Eleven o'clock—right after morning drill. Now get to bed, before you make me promise something else."

She bade him a grateful "Good night!" and went to her room. Once there, she sat by the open window in the darkness—for the moon had gone down—and looked across the parade-ground at the guard-house, which stood out, gaunt and forbidding, against the starlit sky.

Always afterward the scent of dewy grass brought back to her that June night, with the green courtyard, empty save for the sentries, and beyond, in the shadow of the elms, the



"THIS IS A QUEER, CROOKED BUSINESS"

prison where Jim Craig, believing in nothing good—least of all, woman's sincerity—was passing the hours, determined to meet his fate like a soldier.

It was natural for Madge, sitting in quietude, to review the case as she had gathered it so far. Considering dispassionately the colonel's position, she could not but admit that there was a fair foundation for the assumption of Jim Craig's guilt. First and foremost came the word of Lieutenant Marston—the word of a man of unimpeachable integrity and reputation. He was ready to swear that he had come into his house late at night and found the dead body of Captain Harrison on the floor of his sitting-room. Over him stood Lieutenant Craig, with a revolver in his hand. He had struggled with Craig, he said, and gained possession of the revolver. Then Craig had escaped.

That was Marston's story, as she had heard it several times. The fact that it did not agree with Jim's in any of the details proved just one thing—either his accusers were lying, or he was. The murder had been witnessed by two persons—Lieutenant and Mrs. Marston, but a

dozen or more had seen the dead man on the floor, with Jim Craig's revolver by his side.

Harrison's and Craig's presence in Marston's house at a late hour struck no one as particularly remarkable. The Marstons belonged to a free-and-easy crowd, and Mrs. Marston was known to stand on little ceremony as to her hours for receiving. As for Jim Craig, he had announced briefly, in his one interview with Colonel Parsons, that he intended to plead guilty, and wished for no defense.

"If I were not so deeply interested," murmured Madge, "I should enjoy getting to the heart of this tangle. Nothing else puts me on edge like finding myself against a bunch of falsehoods. And this whole case is based on lies, I believe. If I didn't think that, I shouldn't feel so sure of getting Jim out of it. As it is——"

She continued her reflections inaudibly as she prepared for bed without making a light. When she fell asleep there was a smile on her face—the smile of one who is ready for a fair and square battle on the morrow.

A similar smile curled her lip in the morn-

ing, when in the same neat suit and jaunty hat she had worn before going to San Francisco, she sat by the colonel's desk. Talking lightly to him and Doctor Long, as she waited for the officers to come, she was so innocent, and sweet, and irresponsible, that she might have been a matinee girl, waiting to start for the theater. Certainly nothing in her manner suggested that the life of a man was in her hands—a life she valued above that of any other in the world.

"Colonel, dear," she whispered, as the measured tramp of feet sounded outside. "Don't be surprised at anything I may say or do this morning. This is a queer, crooked business——"

"Oh, it is, eh?" interrupted the colonel, as he pointed a finger at her in mock anger. "I'm glad you recognize that."

"Yes, and, because it is, I must take a queer, crooked way to get to the bottom of it. That's all."

The colonel only grunted. He felt, somehow, that he was compromising his dignity by permitting these irregular proceedings at all. And

just because a girl wanted them! But, for the life of him, he didn't know how to get out of it.

The door flew open, and the orderly stood at attention, as five officers, including Lieutenant Collins and Lieutenant Marston, filed in. After them came a man in the uniform of a private, with a stripe on his arm. This was Corporal Thwayte, who had been orderly in the officers' quarters on the night of the homicide.

The men drew themselves up stiffly along the wall. There were not enough chairs in the room to have accommodated everyone. So Colonel Parsons saved himself embarrassment by allowing them all to stand. Then he addressed them, with a mixture of official coldness and geniality. It was always his tone when he spoke to any of his officers formally on subjects connected with the Service.

"Gentlemen, you are summoned here in rather an unusual way. It is at the request of Miss Summers. She has asked leave to conduct an informal inquiry on a matter in which we are all deeply interested, and which concerns very nearly the honor of this post."

"Bully for the old man!"

Lieutenant Collins thought this, but he did not say it aloud.

"I shall consider it a favor," continued the colonel, "if such of you as she sees fit to question give her all possible aid. I have no doubt you will agree with me that the excellent work Miss Summers has done in connection with this case entitles her to pursue her inquiries in her own way, provided the Regulations are not violated."

"Regulations be hanged!" thought Collins. "They've all gone to smash, and the colonel knows it as well as we do. I'm glad of it, too, if it helps Jim Craig to win out."

"Now, then, Miss Summers," said the colonel, "we are at your service."

"Thank you, colonel. But we have not brought in the most important witness."

"Whom do you mean?"

"The man who is charged with the murder—James Craig."

"Oh, you want *him*, do you? You didn't say so."

"No, I didn't say so, because I didn't think of it. Besides, I took it for granted. James

Craig is entitled to face his accusers. In fact, I could not go on without him."

"Couldn't——"

"Well, colonel dear, I wouldn't. It comes to the same thing."

Colonel Parsons' visage screwed up into an expression such as it might have worn if he had seen some one trying to chop wood with his dress sword without being able to get at him. He touched the bell on his table, and when his orderly appeared, said gruffly:

"Bring James Craig from the guard-house, under double guard."

While the orderly was away Madge surveyed the faces of each of the men present. She gave little time to any of them except Marston. Him she looked up and down keenly. Here was the man whose honor had been smirched, and which had not been cleansed even by the death of one of those who had befouled it. What did *he* think of all this? Would he not rather that the two men playing pitch-and-toss with the sanctity of his home had killed each other, instead of one having been allowed to survive? Well, at all events, if Jim Craig should be proved guilty, he would have his full

revenge. Perhaps it would please him to know that the most ignominious death a man could suffer would be the portion of one of those who had injured him, anyhow. Something in his cynical countenance might express this. Or—it might express something else.

For nearly ten minutes there was silence, save for the fluttering of a butterfly against the wire screen of the window, as it tried foolishly to get in from the grass-scented outside. The younger officers stood perfectly still, with the untiring patience drilled into them at the Military Academy long before. As for Corporal Thwayte, he might have been a graven image in khaki.

The colonel endeavored to be patient, too. But, as commanding officer, he was privileged to jerk about uneasily in his chair and drum with his fingers upon his desk, if it relieved him. So he did it. Doctor Long, beside him, watched all the proceedings keenly.

The only person in the room who seemed entirely at ease was Madge. She sat quite still, and her gloved hands, lying easily in her lap, gave no suggestion of desiring to drum upon anything. Having looked over the witnesses

present, she was content to wait calmly for the next act of the drama.

It came at last, with the jingle of spurred heels on the brick pathway around the lawn. Directly afterward the orderly announced that the prisoner was there. A nod from the colonel, and Jim Craig came into the room between two privates. His gaze swept the line of men who used to be his brother-officers. Then he faced the colonel and saluted. Colonel Parsons acknowledged the salute and signed to the two guards, as well as the orderly, to withdraw.

Madge fixed her eyes on Jim Craig's face as soon as he entered. But not once did he look directly at her. He merely included her in the comprehensive glance with which he took in the whole room. Then he waited for what was to follow. Boredom, more than any other emotion, was expressed in his face.

Colonel Parsons looked inquiringly at Madge.

"Yes. All right, colonel," she said, in reply to his tacit query. "I will ask a few questions of Corporal Thwayte first, if you will permit me."

"Corporal Thwayte, stand forward," ordered the colonel.

The corporal marched three steps toward her, brought his heels together, and saluted her, the colonel, and the doctor. All three acknowledged it in military fashion. Then, without further preliminary, Mudge fired her first gun. It was a surprise:

"Corporal Thwayte, do you remember that Lieutenant Marston entered Lieutenant Craig's quarters on the night of the 15th of May?"

Lieutenant Marston, standing in line with the others, did not move, but his eyes opened wider and he listened eagerly for the corporal's answer. It came, in two words:

"Yes, ma'am."

"Will you tell about it, please?"

"Lieutenant Marston came in with two privates—Rand and Safford they were, ma'am—and said he wanted to know if Lieutenant Craig was in quarters, for he must arrest him."

"And you told him Lieutenant Craig had not been back to quarters?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What did Lieutenant Marston do then?"

"He looked about a bit, among Lieutenant Craig's things. Then he came out and said, 'Well, boys, I'm afraid we must give the alarm.' "

"That was all?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You did not see anybody else at Lieutenant Craig's quarters?"

"No, ma'am."

"What time was this?"

"Near midnight, ma'am."

"Thank you. One moment. How was Lieutenant Marston dressed?"

"Why, ma'am, I hardly remember——"

"It was a stormy night, wasn't it? He wore a heavy overcoat, didn't he?"

This was what lawyers called a "lead" question and there might have been a fierce "I object!" if there had been any opposing counsel. As there wasn't, Corporal Thwayte answered:

"Yes, yes. Seems to me he did. Yes, I'm sure of it. He had a big storm coat, with the collar turned up. He dripped rain all over when he came in."

"The coat had pockets, I suppose?"

"Pockets, n' a'm?"

"Pockets, I mean, that would hold things of a fair size. Books or small packages, or—revolvers."

"I suppose so, ma'am."

"That's all, corporal. Thanks."

With a smile she waved Corporal Thwayte away, and he stood back against the wall, to await further orders.

"Colonel Parsons," she said, "I should like to speak to Mr. Craig."

"Mr. Craig!" called out the colonel.

Madge's breath came violently for a few seconds. She had been trying to prepare herself for this ordeal, but it seemed to be harder than she had expected. Jim Craig was almost nonchalant as he stood there. The inquisitor was the disturbed one. She cooled down after the first question, however. There was too much at stake—for the man she loved—to permit her to lose self-control altogether. She addressed the prisoner, but she hardly looked at him now. Toward only one person was her steady gaze directed—Lieutenant George Marston.

"Mr. Craig," she began, "Colonel Parsons

has allowed me to ask you a few questions. I hope you will answer them."

"I will to the best of my ability."

He was as imperturbable and steady as ever he had been when, as her accepted lover, he had walked by her side in the park in San Francisco. A handsome, striking figure he made before them all. Madge saw, with a thrill of pride, that not one of the other officers was his equal in manly grace. It was as if his troubles had endowed him with a dignity of their own.

The interest was all on her side, however. He seemed to be entirely indifferent to her, and replied to her queries with perfect coolness, as if she were a stranger. Madge had always known Jim Craig had nerve.

Having laid out beforehand the line of her questioning, she went straight to the point:

"Why did you choose the evening of May 15th for your call on the Marstons?"

He frowned a little. It could be seen that he did it involuntarily, because the query brought up something he would rather forget. But his voice was quite smooth and natural as he replied:

"I did not 'choose' it."

"Ah!" she went on. "You did not know that Lieutenant Marston was on duty, and could not possibly be at home until very late?"

"I did not think about it," and there was anger in his tone now. "I was calling on Mrs. Marston——"

She interrupted him by switching off suddenly in another question:

"Mr. Craig, when you left your quarters that night, did you carry your revolver?"

"No."

"With what, then, did you shoot Captain Harrison?"

He made a gesture of weariness and impatience.

"I did not shoot him. I've said that before."

"I know," she nodded. "You say that you did not shoot him. But—there's the bullet-wound. How do you explain that?"

"I don't explain it. I only know I didn't shoot him. There was no bullet-wound when I left him."

There was a pause. Madge turned in her chair to look thoughtfully through the window. It was a habit of hers when she was perplexed

or meditating a decisive stroke. When she did break the silence it was to say, with a deceptive reservation:

Ah! It *does* seem difficult to explain. As difficult as why Lieutenant Marston refused to recognize you in Reilly's saloon in San Francisco. As difficult as why he offered to help you to escape from the guard-house the night before last."

"My dear Miss Summers!" blurted out Colonel Parsons.

Jim Craig turned a furious scarlet. He glowered at her as if he could kill her. How had *she* found out that Marston had visited him in his cell?

"It was very unsportsmanlike of me to speak of that, wasn't it?" continued Madge. "But I know what I am doing. I also know what I have to do. And one thing that I have not to do, is to consider anything outside of this case. I'm sorry if Lieutenant Marston is ashamed of some things he may have done or tried to do. But that does not concern me." She paused an instant. Then, quite unexpectedly: "Was Mrs. Marston present that night--the night of the murder?"

"I refuse to answer any more questions."

As he shouted this defiance Jim Craig clenched his fists, looking about him as if seeking some way of escape.

Quite calmly, Madge ignored these demonstrations, continuing, in a judicial tone:

"Mrs. Marston says she was not present. It is on record that her husband says she was not. But still, it is odd. Do you suppose all that noise could have happened so close to her without her having been tempted to come in?"

Jim Craig had folded his arms and was regarding her with stolid obstinacy. He did not answer. She waited a moment and asked:

"You know the position of her bedroom, Mr. Craig? It is just off the parlor."

"Well?" he growled.

Just a hint of a smile crossed her face. She had got at least one word out of him after he had said he would not answer any more questions.

"You know that, just the other side of the wall, she must have heard whatever was going on in that room?"

"I suppose so."

Madge shifted her ground with an abrupt-

ness that startled everybody and brought forth a surprised "By Jove!" from Lieutenant Collins. In solemn tones, she demanded:

"Why did you attack Captain Harrison?"

"It was a private quarrel," he replied. "It can have no bearing on the case."

But she would not be put off.

"What did you quarrel about?"

Jim Craig brought his teeth together with a snap.

"Come, Mr. Craig," she coaxed, in a kindly, impersonal way. "I have been permitted this inquiry for a definite object. I hope you will not try to hamper me in accomplishing that object. It will not improve your case, I assure you."

Her tone was considerate, yet firm and full of warning. She seemed to be reminding him that he was a criminal, and she a detective. Jim Craig could hardly believe that the cool, almost apathetic, cross-examiner, who was grilling him so relentlessly, was the Madge who had walked by his side, with her face against his shoulder, under the trees in San Francisco, not much more than a week before.

She turned, with a calm smile, to the colonel.

"Philosophers say that knowledge is one of man's—and woman's—chief weapons," she remarked, with a doubtful shake of the head. "Sometimes I doubt it."

"Oh, gee!" ejaculated Lieutenant Collins, *sotto voce*. "Philosophers! What's she getting at?"

"Indeed," went on Madge, "there often are times when knowledge avails us very little. For instance, in this case I *know* certain things to be true. Yet I may never be able to prove them."

She swung around to face the prisoner.

"Mr. Craig! Do you remember *everything* that happened that night?"

Jim Craig seemed to think she was laying a trap of some kind for him, for he repeated her words:

"Do I remember?"

"Yes. I am told that you had been drinking. Have you an absolutely clear impression of everything you saw on the night on which you—on which Captain Harrison was killed?"

"Why, yes, I——"

He hesitated. She pressed him—without mercy, as it seemed:

“You remember distinctly why you quarreled?”

“Why, of course. I—struck him, and——”

He stopped in confusion. Any one could tell he was holding something back.

“Surely! We all know that? But why? Why did you strike him? And why, after knocking him down, did you shoot him?”

“I never did!” he shouted, and he was in a fury now. “I never shot him. I *did* knock him down.”

“Well, why?”

She waited—half a minute—three-quarters—a minute. Then, gulping hard, he answered lamely:

“We—we—quarreled.”

With a patient smile, and a glance at Colonel Parsons which told him she hoped to get at the truth eventually, she asked:

“Oh, well—yes, Mr. Craig. We know that. But—for the tenth time—*what was it you quarreled about?*”

Evidently he tried to answer, for his white lips moved. But he did not speak. He could

not find the explanation he wanted—one that would enable him to tell the truth without compromising the woman who had been the cause of it all.

Madge knew what was passing in his tortured mind as well as if he had spoken. And in that moment, the thought of the shallow, blondined creature Jim was trying to shield—while he stood in the shadow of the gallows—maddened her. Madge knew why he did it. She had often heard the hackneyed phrase—one of the most insolent and vicious that ever passed the lips of a libertine—"he perjured himself like a gentleman." Jim Craig had heard it, too, of course, and its spurious heroics naturally appealed to him. Doubtless he felt that he was acting only the part of an honorable man in lying for Mrs. Marston's sake.

Well, Madge did not agree with him. What was the value of that woman's battered reputation compared with Jim Craig's life? The words she had been holding back thundered forth like a blast of shrapnel:

"You don't know what it was that made you strike that man down as if he were a dog—worse, lower than any dog? Mr. Craig! You

don't know? *Well, I know!* I know it all.
And I'll tell you the truth—the truth that is as
clear to me as the sunshine streaming through
that window."

CHAPTER XXIII

"REVEILLÉ"

THERE would have been some sort of a demonstration after such an outbreak, had the men around Madge Summers not been under a stronger spell than mere human emotion—that of military discipline. The only one who moved was Lieutenant Marston, and he merely put one foot forward a step and drew it back.

"Mr. Craig," went on Madge impressively, "you went to Lieutenant Marston's home that night because you wanted to see the woman you loved. You chose a night when you knew her husband would be away. You drank too much during the evening, and when you reached the house—you found some one there before you."

Jim Craig's face was like chalk. But he did not speak. Madge saw that Marston was

slowly bending forward from the line, and that he was staring at her wildly.

"It was a stormy night—with rain—and wind."

Jim started convulsively.

"There was a door opening into an inner room. James Craig, what did you see?"

"See?" faltered Jim. "See? Why—I—— The wind—blew the—door—open, and——"

Madge Summer's mind worked like a flash. Before he could collect himself to contradict the slip he felt he had made, she broke in:

"I'll tell you what you saw. Through that doorway you saw the woman you were in love with—the woman you had come through the storm to see—in the arms of another man!"

Marston lurched away from the line, waving to and fro like a helplessly drunken man. His forehead and cheeks were alternately red and white, his eyes bloodshot.

"Ah!" cried Madge, with a little hysterical laugh. "I'm right, James Craig. It *was* like that! You saw her there with another man—not her husband!"

"Curse him! Yes!" suddenly screamed Marston, shaking a trembling fist at the ceil-

ing. "It was like that. I'm *glad* I killed him! The cur! I *had* to kill him!"

"Lieutenant Marston! Do you know what you are saying?" shouted Colonel Parsons warningly, as he started up from his chair.

"Yes, colonel, I know," insisted Marston. "It is what I should have said long ago. I meant to say it when I found another man was likely to suffer for what he hadn't done. Now I'm going to tell you all about it."

The man was too wild to be controlled—even if there had been any disposition to stop him. There was nothing for it but to let him tell his story in his own way.

Jim folded his arms disdainfully. His attitude seemed to say that he asked nothing but the truth. He did not even glance at Madge, but kept his eyes on Marston.

"On that night—it was very windy and raining hard—I went home—from duty—near midnight. When I opened the door, I saw my wife in—in—Captain Harrison's arms."

"Yes. Well?" prompted Madge, as he stopped. "It was very late, and yet Captain Harrison—whom Mr. Craig was supposed to have killed before that time—was alive and

embracing Mr. Marston? And what did you do?"

Jim Craig darted forward. Lieutenant Collins pulled him back.

"I drew my service revolver, which hung at my belt," replied Marston, slowly, "and—*shot him dead.*"

There was a dramatic pause for nearly a minute. Then Madge Summers, in a tone as calm as if she had been a prosecuting attorney, asked:

"Mrs. Marston saw it?"

"Yes."

"What did she do?"

"She stood there, shivering and moaning, while I put my pistol back in its holster. I saw that the bullet had gone through his chest, and I knew one was enough."

"Yes? And then?"

"I told her I had always suspected her—and him. I remember I said it was a pity one bullet couldn't have done for the two of them. She said I was unjust—that Harrison had come in with James Craig, who had been drinking——"

"Mr. Craig, be quiet, please," interrupted

Madge, as Jim made another involuntary movement. "Go on, Lieutenant Marston."

"She said the two men had quarreled, and she ran out of her room in her wrapper, trying to stop them. But she couldn't. Craig knocked Harrison down with his fist, and, thinking he had killed him, ran away."

"But Captain Harrison was not dead?"

"No. He soon revived, and my wife helped him up. Then he took her in his arms, and—I came in and killed him."

Colonel Parsons was about to give an order of some kind, when Madge caught his eye.

"Let us hear the rest of it, colonel, won't you?" she begged. "All this means a great deal to Mr. Craig."

"I should say it does," growled the colonel. "All right! I'll wait."

"My wife and I stood looking at the body for a few minutes," continued Marston, in a far-away tone, "and she asked me what I was going to do. I told her I wouldn't do anything. I'd killed a man and I should have to take my medicine. She got angry at this. She said she'd had lies enough told about her already at the post, and she wouldn't stand hav-

ing it said that her husband had killed a man on her account."

"Poor thing!" murmured Madge cynically.

But no one heard her, and Marston went on, in the same strained, despairing accents:

"She said I *must* think of something, and soon I did. Jim Craig had gone away thinking he had killed Harrison. That gave me an idea. I told my wife to remain where she was while I went out for a minute or two. She didn't want to do it. It frightened her to be left alone with the—the—body. But I couldn't help that. I had on my storm coat and pulled my cap down over my eyes. It was such a bad night that I did not meet anybody except a sentinel, who saluted as I went by. I made straight for Jim Craig's quarters——"

As he paused, Madge, with hands clasped, looked at Jim Craig. But his eyes were still fixed on Marston, and he did not notice her.

"Who did you see at Mr. Craig's quarters?" asked Madge.

"A soldier—corporal——"

"Corporal Thwayte?"

"Yes, I believe so. I said I wanted Lieutenant Craig. But he was not in quarters."

"Did you see Lieutenant Collins?"

"No. I looked among Craig's things and opened his locker. There I saw his revolver—in its holster. I took out the pistol and slipped it into my overcoat pocket. Then I asked the corporal if he knew where Lieutenant Craig was. He said he didn't, and I told him Craig would have to be arrested when he was found. Then I went back to my own house and laid the pistol on the floor near Harrison's body."

"Well, of all the black, infernal, damnable tricks——" growled the colonel.

"Hush!" warned Doctor Long.

Madge suddenly drew a revolver from her dress, where she had been holding it concealed. It was a heavy weapon of the regulation cavalry type.

"Is that the revolver, Lieutenant Marston?"

He took it in his hand and examined the butt for several moments.

"Yes," he answered deliberately at last.

"That is the pistol."

"You are sure?"

"Quite. There are two peculiar nicks in the steel where it is let into the rubber stock. I had noticed them one day when I was in

Craig's quarters, some time before. He had just got the pistol new, and he gave it to me to look at. When I put it on the floor by the side of Harrison, I saw the nicks and thought of the evening when Craig had first shown it to me."

Madge turned to Colonel Parsons.

"I think, colonel, this should be enough."

"It is," he replied sternly. Then he bellowed: "Orderly!"

When Colonel Parsons roared for anybody like that, he was always obeyed on the jump. The orderly stood in front of him and saluted before the colonel had had time to close his mouth.

"Bring in the guard!"

The two soldiers who had escorted Jim Craig from his prison entered. The colonel pointed to Marston.

"Lieutenant Marston is under arrest," he said gruffly. "March him to the guard-house. Wait a moment! Give him the cell from which you brought Mr. Craig."

Marston fell in between the two troopers and walked away without a word.

"Is Mr. Craig free, colonel?" asked Madge.

Colonel Parsons smiled at her naïveté—which, perhaps, was partly assumed.

"Well, hardly that, Miss Summers. This has been merely an informal questioning, and, in the eyes of the law, whether military or civil, proves nothing. The matter will come up at the court-martial to-morrow, and then something decided can be done. Mr. Craig is still a prisoner, but I will change his prison. He will go to his old quarters, giving his parole to remain there until further orders."

Jim Craig's face had expressed many emotions during Marston's confession. And gradually it had softened. Madge, watching him from the corner of her eye, saw that he looked at her—and his look had a wistfulness that had never been there since that awful night in San Francisco, when he had learned that she was an army detective. Now he turned to Colonel Parsons almost cheerfully:

"I thank you, colonel. I give my parole, of course. I know I did not mean to kill Harrison. But who would have thought I actually didn't do it.

"You have to thank Miss Summers for bringing out the truth."

Jim bowed to Madge with formal gratitude, just as he might have acknowledged an inestimable service from any stranger. ("How can he treat me so?" thought poor Madge.) Then he continued, addressing the colonel:

"There is no danger of my being tried by anything but a court-martial now, is there?"

"Not if it should be shown that your only offenses were striking a superior officer and desertion."

"And what about Lieutenant Marston?" asked Madge.

"I will do what I can for him when his case comes up. He will be tried in a civil court, of course. His confession will simplify matters, and I think, under the circumstances, his sentence will not be very severe."

"You don't think he will be executed, then?" she persisted anxiously.

"No, Miss Summers. There isn't a jury in Kansas would find him guilty of 'first degree,' considering the provocation. Poor fellow! It will be hard enough on him without that. He will be dismissed from the army, of course. And when the civil authorities are through with him he will be forced to begin life all over

again under one of the most dreadful handicaps a man can know. *Gentlemen!*"

The last word was snapped at the officers along the wall. They all drew up with a jerk. The colonel, as stiff as if he had swallowed his sword, stood in front of them and yelped:

"Left face!"

As one man, they pivoted on their heels to the left, facing the open doorway.

"Forward!" sang out the colonel. "*Hurup!*"

This last ejaculation was understood to mean "March!"

The line of officers tramped heavily out of the room. Corporal Thwayte, at a signal from the colonel, fell in behind. When they had all gone the colonel closed the door.

"Mr. Craig!" he said sharply.

Jim stood at "Attention!"

"Yes, colonel!"

"You see Miss Summers sitting there?"

"Yes, colonel."

"Very well. Miss Summers!"

With a smile, she arose and also stood at "Attention!"

"Yes, colonel!"

"My dear, you have saved this man's life

and—honor. He is standing here, but he has no words to thank you. I think he is embarrassed because the doctor and I are here. We are going out." Then to Jim: "You can go to your quarters when you have thanked Miss Summers. Report to me in the morning. *In uniform.* Understand! This whole confounded thing is irregular, but I hope we'll get back to discipline to-morrow."

He took Jim's hand and shook it. Then, with the doctor behind him, he stamped out of the room, growling, and ordered his horse for a long gallop over the rolling prairie. He knew that would compose his nerves, if anything could.

* * * * *

Alone together—for the first time since that night in San Francisco!

Madge was seated facing the window. It was her disposition to turn always to the light when she could. Jim Craig stood, erect and silent, just where he had been when the colonel dropped his hand.

So they remained for some time, Madge willing to speak, but afraid of a rebuff. He

—well, he hardly knew what to do. She had saved his life. That was beyond all question. On the other hand, was it not she who by treachery had placed it in jeopardy? Could he ever forgive her?

Could he? What was this strange fluttering at his heart as he noted her soft, yet firm, profile, and the frank gaze of her gray eyes? Hadn't he got over that foolishness, after all the injury she had done him? Hadn't he?

In the endeavor to fight his way clear of the perplexity that enveloped him, he glanced out of the window, too. An elderly robin, waving about on an elm bough that brushed the glass, winked at him impudently. Jim Craig must have been more unstrung than he supposed, for he could have sworn the bird chirped: "Go to her, Jim! It's all right!"

"Madge!"

"Jim!"

As he took her two hands in his, she ceased to be a detective—because detectives don't shed tears, as a rule. Certainly not in business. The warm drops on his fingers remained there till they dried away. He would no more have

brushed them off than he would have struck her in the face.

There was a long pause. Then——

"And now, Jim—dear," she said wistfully, "it's time to say good-by."

"Madge, can't you forgive me?"

"I'm going back to Washington to-night," she went on unheeding. "I'm glad to be able to wish you luck with—with a light heart."

"A light heart, Madge?"

"There's nothing more for me to do here."

"Nothing more. Nothing more—except—except—to take charge of my life as long as it lasts," he whispered passionately.

"No, no!" she protested, shaking her head. "But say, just once, that you've forgotten what—what—I——"

He pulled her roughly into his arms, though she struggled. At last she dropped her head and let the slow tears fall. Then she looked up, smiling, with quivering lips and wet eyes.

"Never say more I'm a witch!" she breathed softly. "They're cold, unearthly things at best, and never could know love as I'm knowing it at this minute!"

"But you'll want your broomstick, to fly to the moon," he reminded her.

"We've a better kingdom than any old moon!" was her reply.

"Yes, Madge—my love! Here!" And he held her closer in his arms.

THE END.